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# The same ashes will cover all of us: the effects of the roles of perpetrator, victim and resistor on the construction of the family in Holocaust literature

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“The same ashes will cover all of us”: The effects of the roles of perpetrator,  
victim and resistor on the construction of the family in Holocaust literature

by

Laura Kimberly Taggett

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
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1999

Graduate College  
Iowa State University

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of  
  
Laura Kimberly Taggett  
  
has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

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Major Professor

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Committee Member

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Committee Member

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Committee Member

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For the Major Program

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For the Graduate College

Written in Pencil in Sealed Freight Car

*here in this carload  
i am eve  
and abel my son  
if you should see my other son  
cain son of man  
tell him that i*

Don Pagis

If it is not too presumptuous:  
For those who died,  
and those who lived to tell about it,

and for Dawson, should I ever let this go enough for you to actually read it.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

*After Treblinka  
and the spezialkommando  
who tore a child with his bare hands  
before its mother in Warsaw  
we see differently.*

Edward Bond

**Rationale**

Why am I, an American of mixed descent (but not Jewish), without any direct links to World War II (save an American grandfather who fought), choosing the literature of the Holocaust for my master's thesis? What guided my desire to choose an area of study that seems so carefully guarded? What gives me the right? Am I one of those seemingly sentimental people who, by writing about it, wish to make sure an event like this never happens again (as if this can have any impact at all)?

Yes.

Do I want to try to understand why these events happened in the first place?

Yes. Yes, even though I'm so very aware of statements like Raul Hilberg's: "If you weren't there, you can't know" (Lang 17).

Do I want to figure out why some Holocaust fiction and drama is more effective than others?

Yes.

Am I attempting to relate to those who suffered and died most horribly?

No, I recognize there is no possible way I can.

When analyzing something as emotionally charged as the Holocaust, and the literature it inspired and generated, there is no conceivable way to remove the "human" or

emotional element in discussion, no matter how much theory is applied. This raw emotional power is elemental. To ponder the idea that human nature could reach so unthinkable a point that the annihilation of millions of people could be sanctioned, it is obvious (to me anyway) that there is more than one lesson to learn.

As I have been immersed in the thought process that created these pages, I have continued to run up against the impossibility of truly understanding what happened in Germany in the 1930's and '40's. Yet there is a comfort in that lack of understanding. I will never know the horror of being targeted for extinction. I will, in all likelihood, never know what it is like to live when life is more terrible than death. But this comfort zone does not allow me to sit back without concern for whether such atrocity could happen again. This work, this thesis, is what I seem most capable of doing to prevent that.

The sheer power of the Holocaust asks us to confront a tremendous amount of traumatic images and concepts at once. Finding a secure foothold within the material is essential. I have chosen the family unit as the focus within my primary works, because of the *myth* that the family is indestructible. Most of us are raised to believe that the family has a seeming immutability to any and all forces. Of course, we know that families are indeed extremely vulnerable to a variety of forces. But the *belief* in the power of the family is something that human beings hold dear. The concept of *family* is also a bridge to a time that may be difficult to relate to otherwise; it allows those of us with no connection to the Holocaust to make an attempt to understand it.

In choosing my primary texts, I chose three plays and a novel for a specific reason. Theatre is the epitome of "show, don't tell." Playwright Joanna Kraus agrees that: "live theatre is electric. There is an immediacy to it" (Kraus, personal letter to author Aug 19,

1998). Where a reader can close the book until he/she is ready to deal with the words on the pages, or the observer can move away from a piece of art that is disturbing, the theatre-goer is an active participant in the performance in front of him/her. Leaving the theatre is a testament to the power of what is being played out on the stage. As Kraus states: "You are there with the character. You can't put a performance down, as you might a novel" (letter to author). The playwright has the unique opportunity to create a complete interactive world in which the audience will have a part. By bringing the Holocaust to the stage, the playwrights that I have chosen communicate the emotional power of the Holocaust in ways that are unique and commanding, leaving the audience affected and moved. The Holocaust may be a main character in the works or it may be the impetus of the events that take place, but it is always there, hovering, waiting to destroy both the individuals and their families.

C.P Taylor's *Good* takes us inside the mind of a college literature professor, John Halder, as he sacrifices all that he'd held dear to rise in the Nazi party. The John Halder that we meet at the beginning of the play is not the Halder of the end. His "old" life has died; his new life at Auschwitz is hideous to us. For Taylor, the Holocaust is a powerful event or theme that can not be denied. In his preface to *Good*, he states:

I grew up during the war under a deeply felt anxiety that the Germans might win the war, overrun Britain and that I and my mother and father would end up, like my less fortunate co-religionists, in a nazi (*sic*) death camp—perhaps one specially built in Scotland or England. . . There seems to have been some pressure building up in me for a long time to write a play about the Final Solution, marking and responding to a great historical and personal trauma. Not as a Jew, wanting to add my wreath to those already piled high at the graves of the Six Million, but as my own little gesture to revive their memory in our consciousness. It still seems that there are lessons to be learned if we can examine the atrocities of the Third Reich as the result of the infinite complexity of contemporary human society and not a simple conspiracy of criminals and psychopaths. The 'Inhumanities' seem to me only too human and leading to a final Final Solution to end



all Final Solutions—the solution to the Human Problem, a nuclear holocaust.  
(*Good 4*)

Taylor (who, with Joanna Kraus, are the only Jewish authors whose works I am analyzing) foresees the Holocaust as only one in a string of possible (increasingly deadly) events that presage our continuing world history.

Joanna Kraus' *Remember My Name* introduces us to Rachel, who is sent by her parents to a small, isolated town in the Alps to be safe from the Nazi invasion of France. Alone, she must take on a new identity as she becomes involved in the Resistance with her new "family" in St. Laurent des Pins. Kraus wished to "tell the stories of 'Righteous People' to show that in a time of inhumanity, there was some humanity" (Kraus, letter to author).

Barbara Lebow's *A Shayna Maidel* shows us the struggles of a family reuniting after the War. Only Mordechai and his daughter Rose ("Americanized" from Rayzel) escaped Poland. His wife and oldest daughter Luisa were too ill to leave; by the time they were well, they were not allowed to leave. Mordechai holds tightly to his heritage, and the pride and guilt that comes with it. Luisa wishes only to find her husband and begin to understand what all the changes have wrought. Rose, thoroughly "Americanized," resents the intrusion of a sister she doesn't even remember. LeBow wished to write about the Holocaust in a communal setting, and bring various voices to the Holocaust, while sidestepping the issue of the camps, and concentrating on the family. (source!)

Ursula Hegi's novel *Stones from the River*, complements the plays' power, revealing the Holocaust experience in the fullness of the narrative. As with the plays, the Holocaust is a reason for the events of the book, and moves like an invisible force in

destroying, and, yes, building lives. It motivates the actions of the characters. The narrator, Trudi, is at once an outsider and the memory and heart of the town. Born a *zwerg* (dwarf), she hoards the secrets of the town as well as her own, as she watches the war destroy all that she has known, and how she will view her hometown. The town that is left after the War is not the same, nor is Trudi. Ursula Hegi's childhood growing up in Germany led her to investigate her "homeland's" tainted history in a fictional mode.

As we will see in the pages that follow, the Holocaust is as much a member of the "family" as any person. These authors allow us a view inside the family and to see the effect that the Holocaust has on it. In concentrating on the individual's role within the family, this thesis will by no means be an exhaustive review of Holocaust drama. It will concentrate solely on these four works. In addition, this will not discuss the formation of the roles of perpetrator victim and resistor, but will concentrate on the roles outside the standard need of widening the nearly stereotypical confinements of those labels. This thesis will not discuss the historicity of the Holocaust or the debate as to whether the Holocaust should be taught. The assumptions in place within this thesis are that the Holocaust as a watershed event and teaching tool is invaluable and should not be ignored, if only to stop the growing Holocaust denial movement. What must not be assumed, however, is that all scholars agree about the validity of Holocaust literature.

### **License in the literature of the Holocaust**

*Accept the idea that you will never see what they have seen—  
and go on seeing now, that you will never know the faces that  
haunt their nights, that you will never hear the cries that rent  
their sleep. Accept the idea that you will never penetrate the  
cursed and spellbound universe they carry within themselves*

*with unfailing loyalty. And so I tell you: You who have not experienced their anguish, you who do not speak their language, you who do not mourn their dead, think before you offend them, before you betray them. Think before you substitute your memory for theirs.*

Elie Weisel (qtd. in Brown 4)

“In the beginning, there was the Holocaust, we must therefore start all over again...” asserts Weisel. He also states “Whoever has not lived through the event can never know it” (Brown 4). Having attempted time and again to understand, using language, what happened to him when the “the little faces of children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a lent blue sky,” he finds, after all, that only silence can fully express the horror and sheer inexplicability of the Holocaust (*Night* 32). Poet and survivor Aaron Tsaylin writes that, after the Holocaust, even God would maintain a “deep silence. For even an outcry is now a lie, even tears are mere literature, even prayers are false” (qtd in Lang 179). Theodor Adorno, a survivor and literary theorist who left Germany in 1934, states that to create art from the Holocaust is to

squeeze aesthetic pleasure out of artistic representation of the naked bodily pain of those who have been knocked down by rifle butts... It is transfigured and stripped of some of its horror and with this, injustice is already done to the victims. (qtd. in Lang 179)

While these statements speak clearly to the emotional protectiveness felt by survivors, other critics condone using the Holocaust as a subject of creative writings, but only if the author survived the Holocaust. There are a variety of approaches to—or theories about—the literature of the Holocaust, based mostly on the ideas that only a few things can be said about that period and only a few people should say them. For theorists like Lawrence Langer, for example, we who are not Jewish and did not experience that time in

history are suspect when we choose to write about it, because of our lack of personal experience. Consequentially, the non-participant<sup>1</sup> authors whose works I have chosen as subjects of this thesis are, in effect, doing harm upon Holocaust survivors. In *Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, Langer states

Authors like. . .Weisel. . .and others, all of whom. . .were intimately involved in the Nazi catastrophe...recognized that their experience would have to be recorded, if it were to be authentic. . . .Whether writers who did *not* possess empirical evidence of this universe could create its atmosphere is [a] debatable question. (20)

Critics such as Langer continue to support this stand through an implied (though rarely overtly stated) dismissal of literature by non-participants, exemplified by a strict concentration on fact-based writings, such as those by Paul Celan, Charlotte Delbo, Nelly Sacks and of course Weisel<sup>2</sup>. Even historian Michael Marrus restates Emil Fackenheim's credo: "[we need to insist that historians] acknowledge prior limitations on what they can or cannot explain" (19). Writer and survivor Aharon Appelfeld would have us limit the literature of the Holocaust to only that of "true" experience because "the literature of testimony is undoubtedly the authentic literature of the Holocaust" (Lang 85).

Whether the writing is memoir, fact-based, or fictional, critic Inga Clendinnen states "Our knowledge that [the author] has 'been there' supplies an undertext of intimate moral implication never present in 'pure' fiction" (86), noting that an author "fails" when writing mere fiction, rendering the reader less willing to "heed" the text (88). She claims that all

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the term "non-participants" refers to those authors who are writing about the Holocaust, without experiencing it.

<sup>2</sup> See Langer's *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, or *The Age of Atrocity* for discussion of this exclusion. (Although in his later *Admitting the Holocaust*, he does say that survivor testimony is "only a staring place" ("History in Holocaust Literature," 77).

fiction (even that by survivors) about the Holocaust is sub-standard and somehow irrelevant, quoting Weisel that modern representations of the Holocaust give the audience “a little history, a heavy dose of sentimentality and suspense, [and] a flash of theological ruminations about the silence of God...” (Clendinnen 92).

Granted, there is a grain of truth in this and Clendinnen’s statement that we listen differently to stories that are “real,” and create Barthian “that-has-been” moments that are so crucial in understanding. But does that justify the bias against Holocaust fiction by non-participants? Does the Holocaust then become the sole property of survivors? While he did argue that testimony was the most authentic, Appelfeld says no.

[W]hen it comes to describing reality, art always demands a certain intensification, for many and various reasons. However, that is not the case with the Holocaust. Everything in it already seems thoroughly unreal, as if it no longer belongs to the experience of our generation, but to mythology. Thence comes the need to bring it down to the human realm. . .to attempt to make the events speak through the individual and in his language, to rescue the suffering from huge numbers, from dreadful anonymity....(Lang 92)

Not only is the Holocaust the “stuff that myth is made of,” but I contend contemporary authors can do a great deal to bring that event to a level which modern-day audiences can understand and appreciate. It is my opinion that relegating Holocaust literature only to the survivors would render Appelfeld’s individual silent yet again. We who wish to continue discussion about the Holocaust would be gagged, in a sense. As critic Irving Howe logically notes, “The Holocaust is continuous with, indeed forms, a sequence of events within Western history” (Lang 175); thus it is not beneficial to view it as standing alone in the historical timeline. It is a part of world history that effects all of us with its monstrosity. As recently as May 1999, Allied forces are bombing Kosovo in an attempt to stop ethnic cleansing. Mass murders of the Bahutu tribe have taken place in Rwanda twice in the last

decade (Newsweek, reprinted in Chartrock and Spencer 328-331). It seems that the lessons of the Holocaust are being ignored, and must continue to be taught.

Limiting the literature of the Holocaust to works by survivors, putting them on a pedestal in effect, creates a chasm between the texts and the events, a seeming surrender to the futility of trying to capture the Holocaust in literature or analyze it in criticism. This chasm promotes the silence of the Holocaust, a silence that could allow its truth to fade from memory. A Holocaust considered off-limits connotes a subject that deserves no more discussion. This chasm, which critic Emily Miller Budick fears “increas[es] temporal distance” from the Holocaust itself, must be dealt with, to avoid making the Holocaust “more precarious” or making “forgetting it all that much easier” (330). The silence that Weisel and others advocate is, as Budick states, “...difficult to imagine...how [that silence] would avoid simply obliterating the Holocaust, not only from the written historical record but also from consciousness itself” (Sicher 33). A valid inquiry demands an answer.

Kenneth Seeskin proposes one when he states:

One solution is to not write about the subject at all. . .To the writer concerned about the Holocaust, this answer is unacceptable. Silence can be taken for acquiescence, or in some circles, lack of interest. Neither is a legitimate response to the death of the six million (Lang 111).

While there is a popular conception that silence is itself a poignant memorial, a prolonged silence can signal lack of interest or even ignorance. This, as Seeskin states, is “unacceptable.” I concur with historian Michael Marrus: “we owe it to survivors, and to ourselves, to conduct as objective and as thorough an inquiry as we can—along with whatever commemorative or philosophical reflections may be appropriate” (19). This perspective suggests that it cannot be an area of study open solely to survivors. We are now

over 50 years away from the end of World War II; as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum notes, “The postwar generation of Holocaust eyewitnesses and scholars in the field of Holocaust studies is passing from the scene” (“The First Five Years,” 17).

Survivors are dying. Would theorists have new literature about the Holocaust, and the discussion of it, die with them? As Budick notes, it is necessary to question the political motivations behind those who object to the continued discussion of the Holocaust (332). As philosopher Dominick LaCapra states, “revisionist theory would have conversation about the Holocaust discontinued in denial that the Holocaust ever even occurred, or that it was as destructive as history tells us” (74). The question of why we *wouldn't* want to continue discussion about the Holocaust seems to be unnecessary. As the adage goes, “Those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it.” Many survivors have expressed frustration with the world’s inability to learn from their experiences. We must continue to try.

The literature of the Holocaust is not the first arena in which the battle of critical “rights” has been fought. Consider an analogy: the appropriateness of white critics approaching Black literature. As some critics would have only survivors write about the Holocaust, so many African-American writers and critics would keep white critics from discussing African American literature. Critic Vincent Leitch states that, during the 1960’s, Blacks desired freedom from “racist” white influence when they restated Malcolm X’s opposition to integration, seeking “cultural autonomy based on the brotherhood of all people of African descent” (335-337). Like Holocaust critics who validate only survivor literature, Leitch parallels what Stephen Henderson says: only Blacks can fully understand “the social experiences, moral and political values, linguistic forms, religious practices and emerging aspirations of black people in America” (339). This sentiment has not gone away

over time. Gwendolyn Brooks, as late as the 1980's, did not mince any words: "...many Negroes no longer want any part of even *wonderful* whites. They have suffered so many crushes that now they are turning to themselves" (137). Toni Morrison acknowledges that her work "requires me to think about how free I can be as an African-American woman writer in my genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized world" (4), taking into account other "forces" besides race.

In contrast to these exclusionary statements, Peter Erickson counters that if white critics disqualify themselves from Black literature, they are taking the "easy" way out when they say "they are unqualified by virtue of identity" (170). Morrison, seeming to contradict her own earlier statement, likewise argues for an extended study of literature; a wider "landscape" including all artists and subjects, which would recognize "th[at] literature that is not only universal but race-free risks lobotomizing that literature. . .diminishing both art and artist" (2, 12). While there needs to be an acknowledgement of the position the author comes from, it need not be the defining force in the discussion of that author's literature. Echoing Morrison, critic Phillip Leon states (referring to William Styron's *Nat Turner*), "To resent a white writer's attempt to enter the consciousness of a Negro slave severely restricts the creative impulse" (263). It is destructive to dictate or restrict what an author can or cannot write about. Indeed, Erickson argues that a "greater energizing force" can be gained from dialogue "represented by the entire literary spectrum" of Black literature and literature, as well as art and drama by non-Blacks (171). He believes that we won't become a "raceless, genderless society" as some contend, but we will learn to see difference as a means of exploration that can "vary but also be actively changed" (173), thus opening the door for varying readings and interpretations. Nellie McKay's May 1998 *PMLA* article



argues that had “intervention” (an attempt to open discussion on who can teach African-American literature, by both Blacks and whites) occurred 30 years ago, the question of who can teach what would be irrelevant (364). McKay notes that a timely resolution to *who* can teach *what* would have broadened the dialogue about African American literature; the same can be said about Holocaust literature.

This analogy provides insight into the debate over creative license in Holocaust literature. As Emily Budick rightly notes, Morrison and Alice Walker both write about slavery (and coincidentally, the Holocaust), never having experienced it, receiving praise, not criticism (332). They did not directly experience slavery which opens the door to non-participant literature, and leads us to question what makes it acceptable for non-participant authors to discuss slavery (at times called “America’s holocaust”) and not the Holocaust.

Once the door is open for non-participants, some critics recommend that caution be the watchword when writing about the Holocaust. Leon notes that Styron avoided “trespassing on Jewish suffering and death at the hands of Hitler’s executioners and topicality (in *Sophie’s Choice*) by intense research” (263). With history and research to support their work, Leon seems to allow non-participants “license” to write about the Holocaust. Critic Irving Howe states “About the Holocaust, there cannot be too much documentation, and what matters most in such material is exactitude...” (Lang 182), noting that, echoing Leon, thorough research is necessary and expected for non-participants to join the discussion about Holocaust literature. Finally, critic Efraim Sicher provides further argument for such license by noting that while “[t]he author who writes *after* an event that surpasses the limits of human imagination faces no ordinary problem of literary boundaries,” there should be no objection to the “appropriation” of the Holocaust because

of the very real inability for anyone to claim proprietary knowledge of all that happened during that time (311).

In all likelihood, the Holocaust will not be the only event in history that surpasses our ability to understand; Langer cites the Vietnam War experience as another example of a series of inexplicable events which the majority of the world's population didn't experience and will never truly "know." While some would argue that Vietnam cannot compare to the tragedy of the Holocaust, still there were lives "meaninglessly" lost for reasons that few understood. It would seem to this reader that the shared respect and awareness of the inability to fully understand such events as the Holocaust can indeed serve as a "common ground" for both survivors and those of us who enter the arena later, as Langer acknowledges that fiction can provide a bridge to understanding (*Age of Atrocity* 9) for both survivors and non-participants.

When we invite non-participants into the arena of Holocaust literature, new texts will be introduced and we will be given new, perhaps even enlightening, perspectives of the human condition during World War II. Lore Segal, critic and daughter of a survivor, notes that the distance non-participants bring to literature is at times "crucial"; the specific personal memories or ideas about events that to us seem connected or similar that we as readers bring to a text can help us to understand, perhaps, what we have not experienced (Lang 58-9). Non-participants can bring new perspectives to the Holocaust. Even Langer himself notes that the Holocaust has become a theme instead of an event. "Prose narrative, fiction and verse" can serve as a "composite portrait" to rescue the Holocaust from "obscurity and light up its dreadful features with the deciphering rays of language" (*Art from the Ashes* 3). Non-participant literature can serve as a segment of that "composite," to

make it more full and accessible to contemporary audiences. The silence that some critics would demand of non-participants is unacceptable to critic and author Robert Brown who simply says “We cannot dare not to speak...for it must be studied, reflected upon, written about, recalled” (5). Finally, survivor and scholar Yaffa Eliach states “we need you, who did not come from the land soaked with our parents blood, to continue to talk about the Holocaust, and to provide insight. We will always stand on that land soaked with the blood of our parents, our grandparents, our sisters, our brothers, our husbands. We need you to provide greater insight and help future generations to understand what we died for.”

For the critics and writers who would allow non-participants a voice in this discussion, the Holocaust is indeed big enough for all parties. With the continued discussion, the Holocaust will not fade from memory and from importance. The authors that I concentrate on in this paper, whose works are grounded in proper research and a respect for the topic, are on firm and valuable ground.

### **The effects of the Holocaust on the family**

*Only someone who was without family for as long as  
I was can appreciate, as I do, the joy and sense of completeness  
that a loving family can provide.*

Survivor David Weiss Halivni

Socrates stated that no matter how repulsive an action seems, the fact that someone undertook it shows that it was not repulsive to the agent (qtd. in Lang 113). Much later, Freud argued that “Men are not gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love, who simply defend themselves if they are attacked; the powerful measure of aggression has to be reckoned as part of their instinctual endowment” (qtd. in Hass 27). These seemingly

prescient statements open the door to an explanation of those aspects of human nature that “allowed” the Holocaust to happen. How the Holocaust happened is still a question that has no definitive answer. In the discussion of the “roots” of the Holocaust, there is a tendency to want to blame it all on Hitler and disregard the worldwide history of antisemitism, or the idea that there is a trait within human beings that would allow mass slaughter to occur at all. When Hitler came to power, his skill as a manipulator served him well to capitalize both on the latent antisemitism<sup>3</sup> and the desire his country had to restore the damaged economy that plagued Germany after World War I.

At the most basic level, the deadly Final Solution would never have happened without Hitler. But to say that he was wholly responsible for the millions of deaths that occurred in Germany from 1933 to 1944 is simplistic and close-minded. As Historian Daniel Goldhagen notes,

[the Germans] had been weaned and fed on an existing antisemitic culture, still heavily informed by the traditional Christian conception of Jews. . . that the Jew was different from the German, that he was the binary opposite of the German...that he was not just benignly different, but malevolent and corrosive (60, 55).<sup>4</sup>

Because of this, we cannot place responsibility solely on Hitler; Hitler used that cultural belief to facilitate his plan to create a “pure” Aryan nation. Psychologist Leslie Berger observes that “[his] ability to consolidate his power was greatly facilitated by the psychological, social, political and economic conditions of Germany” (21). Times were “desperately hopeless” after the end of World War I, with the economy in shambles.

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<sup>3</sup> I’m using Goldhagen’s spelling.

<sup>4</sup> This paper will not trace the history of antisemitism. For a more complete timeline, refer to Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, Yahuda Bauer’s *A History of the Holocaust*, or any of the many textbooks on the Holocaust.

Hitler's promises, concrete and simple, inspired the German people to follow him almost blindly. Berger observes that "By tradition and personality, the Germans were perhaps more accepting of an absolute authoritarian leadership than others would have been..." (23).

No one can deny that Hitler was a charismatic leader. Whether or not the German people were more susceptible to that charisma than any other group of people is somewhat cloudier. It can be said that their desire for a better economy drove them to extreme lengths. LaCapra offers another rationale, quoting historian Ernst Nolte, who says that the Nazis merely followed in Russia's footsteps: "the Nazis did it because the Russians did it first, and the Nazis were afraid that the Russians would do it to them" (50); in other words Nazism and the Final Solution were *defensive* maneuvers. As with so many aspects of the Holocaust, a definitive answer may never be known.

As the Nazis and Hitler gained power and moved against their enemies, "cohesiveness and morale increased," making individual resistance very difficult (although of course not impossible) (Berger 24). Berger states that the German people became (albeit very obedient) "prisoners" in their country, with the highest national moral requirement being obedience and loyalty to Hitler. Berger notes that, at this point, change could only come from the outside; the wheel that had begun to spin could not be stopped (31). We cannot forget that the Allied forces knew about the beginnings of Nazi actions toward the Jews long before they finally acted.

One aspect of Nazi Germany that needs to be clearly understood to set the groundwork for this paper is the idea that much of Germany did indeed support Hitler and did what they could to further his dictates, even at the expense of friends, family, denying the widespread death that surrounded them. As psychologist Mahrzarin Banaji noted, one of

the best ways to feel good about being a part of a group is to denigrate those not a part of it (Paul 54), and in doing so, somehow the inexplicable becomes the accepted. Goldhagen quotes German citizen Melita Maschmann on the events of *Kristallnacht*:

For the space of a second I was clearly aware that something terrible had happened. . .but almost at once, I switched over to accepting what had happened as over and done with, and avoiding critical reflection...if the Jews sow hatred against us all over the world, they must learn that we have hostages for them in our hands (103).

Goldhagen notes, as this incident illustrates, that after *Kristallnacht*, it became clear that the Germans would stand behind their Führer, regardless of the moral implications that such loyalty entailed (102). Even some of those who took part in the Resistance agreed with the basic tenets of National Socialism, though they recognized that the “implementation was exaggerated and carried too far” (Goldhagen 115). As we will see in the texts examined in the following chapters, those who took action did so at varying levels of involvement, but always present were strong feelings for or against Hitler and his dictates.

No one statement can sum up the roots of the Holocaust. Far too many elements were at play in its evolution for there to be one cause. What will be important to this paper is the idea that “ordinary Germans” would go to great lengths to support their Führer, and concepts such as “right” and “wrong” became irrevocably confused.

### **The power of the family in the literature of the Holocaust**

*Consider, for example, the impact of the Holocaust literature on our Romantic Heritage; infinitude of spirit dwindles to the defeat of the body, physical despair; the inviolable self ebbs into the violated self, defenseless against the fury of power; the idea of the future as a dream of unbounded possibility and*

*automatic progress subsides into a nightmare of violence and  
annihilation, an abrupt end to everything we consider human.*

Lawrence Langer (*Art from the Ashes* 4)

The Holocaust is far too complex for anyone to fully understand, and the horrors of the concentration camps and the mass murders are beyond most people's capacity to understand. But what these things represent cannot be ignored. What they say about human nature, that we have a capacity for great evil, cannot be ignored. What Holocaust literature does is bring these events to the reader, and provide a point of access.

To those who would believe that the Holocaust has no lasting impact on the world in general, or on literature more specifically, Langer states that "as we move from the literal to the literary, we begin to understand those commentators who insist that the impact of the Holocaust in reality exceeds the force of any imaginative work that might seek to capture it" (*Art* 5). On one hand is the seeming unreality of fact; on the other, fiction moored in that reality (*Art* 8). While it is not the purpose of this paper to make a case for the place of fiction in Holocaust studies (I personally don't feel one needs to be made<sup>5</sup>), there is unmistakable logic to Langer's statement that the literature of the Holocaust requires a context (*Art* 4). It draws on experiences so foreign to the majority of us that we may consider it, as Langer notes, "an alien world of fantasy." It so threatens all "systems of value that we have cherished for generations and millennia that we shrink instinctively from its implications and hence, often from its truths" (*Art* 4). Because of that reluctance to fully grasp the horrors of the Holocaust and what they can teach us, Langer stresses the importance of finding "landmarks" in the literature to help us find our way through the

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<sup>5</sup> Elie Wiesel himself disagrees: "there is no such thing as Holocaust literature—there cannot be. Auschwitz negates all literature—Holocaust literature? The very term is a contradiction" (Brown 5).

unfamiliar terrain (*Art* 6). The mythical indestructibility and the ideal of the family unit is one such landmark.

“One advantage,” Langer states

of a fully fictionalized version of the dilemma of parent-child relationships during the Holocaust is its ability to offer a more subtle and complex vision, more challenging to our capacity for judging behavior and evaluating motive. (“Family Dilemmas in Holocaust Literature,” 392)

If we were presented only with “factual” accounts, we would see only “a world of absolute values...and have little trouble assessing human conduct” (Langer, “Family” 395).

However such absolute words as “never” and “always” cannot be applied to every situation, let alone situations within the Holocaust. Holocaust literature, as Langer notes, imposes upon us the “task of finishing [an] unfinished tale” (“Family” 398), supplying, at times, personal knowledge and experience to what we are seeing or reading, bringing us closer to the text. For example, we are not told the day-to-day accounts of what happens to Anne Frank in the camps, only that she and her sister died of typhus. We must fill in that gap ourselves, using things, ideas and language that are familiar to us. In doing that, the Holocaust suddenly seems more deadly and personal. Our imaginations which can be much more frightening than anything anyone else can tell us, make the literature more effective.

Critic Tania Modleski compares Holocaust literature to a soap opera because of its ability to serve as a means of identifying with personalities and relationships, forming intimacies with characters that we may read about or see (qtd. in Patraha 68) (which, according to Vivian Patraha, stands contrary to fascism which negates difference and “submerges the individual” [69]). As viewers feel a commitment to the characters they watch in a soap opera, putting a human face on the events of the Holocaust can render those



events more accessible and more personal. To be sure, Modleski is not saying that all Holocaust drama and literature is a soap opera, complete with melodrama, and would not want the simplistic comparison carried too far or taken too seriously. The mere identification that we share with characters about whom we read provides for us a stage on which to view these people who could be our friends. On another level, as Joanna Kraus notes, Holocaust literature still resonates today, because “good/evil, victim/oppressor, innocent/criminal are dramatically opposed,” letting the audience fill in its own knowledge to make the binaries more personal and affective (letter to author). “The conflict is sharp. The struggle is desperate,” notes Kraus, drawing the audience in, and perhaps spurring us to learn more.

While our imaginations, and characters that we relate to, work to bring the Holocaust to the audience, Critic Harry James Cargas notes that “extraordinary approaches must be found” (153), along with extraordinary means of telling the tale of the Holocaust perpetrator, survivor, or resistor. Some means work better than others. For example, comedy is not always successful; neither are thinly veiled metaphors”<sup>6</sup> (154). The former can be insulting, the latter “preachy.” It is understood that the audience must find the characters believable, and shock value and “eye catching staging” must be avoided, for they insult and undermine the experience shared by the victims of the Holocaust (160).

Another answer to the question of how to bring the Holocaust to a modern day audience could be found in rediscovering the power of the family within the ashes of the Holocaust. The idea of family is something nearly everyone shares, be it in practice or

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<sup>6</sup> Cargas offers Liberman’s *Throne of Straw*, and Hochhuth’s *The Deputy* as plays which use such devices and fail.

theory. Therefore, by incorporating an idea that most are familiar with, the authors are able to draw the reader or audience member closer in other ways to what he/she is reading/viewing. Thus the family unit serves as another of Langer's "bridges," drawing the audience/reader into the world the author is creating. In the texts that are examined in this paper, the tone, more often than not, is somewhat aloof and detached. They leave a great deal of responsibility to the audience or reader to fill in the gaps, and the emotion within. By incorporating the family in various stages of dissolution, the authors are able to connect with the audience in a way that allows the author to step back from the potentially melodramatic content of the Holocaust and tell a story, sparsely and effectively. As critic E.R. Isser notes of LeBow's *A Shayna Maidel*,

It is no oversight that Luisa's death camp remains unknown...[Lebow] takes for granted her audience will know the terrifying facts about roundups, the deportations, the selection process, and the conditions inside the camps.... The author's decision not to represent or describe life in the camps forces the audience to imagine the horror that the young survivor has undergone...the play becomes, for the less informed... another melodrama about a family in crisis. (144)

This acknowledgement of two possible ways to interpret the play illustrates the depth of Holocaust fiction, and the necessity for that depth. None of these authors place their works inside the camps or the most traditionally awful landmarks of the Holocaust. They deal with the after-effects, or the side-effects, of the Nazi actions, thus granting the author some room to maneuver around what could be traps for non-participants with no experience of the camps or the tortures<sup>7</sup>. For *Stones from the River*, the use of a *zwerg* antagonist presents the

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<sup>7</sup> Roberto Benigni, in his 1998 movie *Life Is Beautiful* does take his audience into an Italian concentration camp, but leaves many of the most terrifying aspects (the "showers," murders, etc.) to the imagination.

view of the outsider and provides a seeming objectivity that lets the horror of the Holocaust speak for itself. As we have noted, more than a half century from the events of the Holocaust, authors must find a way to make it accessible to future generations as well as ours.

In the following chapters, we will begin to look more closely at the mindset and the family situations of three “categories” of people during the Holocaust: perpetrators and their families; victims and their families; and resisters and their families. Examining the primary texts for this paper, we will see the repercussions of the Holocaust on the various forms of the family.

## CHAPTER 2. PERPETRATORS AND THEIR FAMILIES

*Men have gained control over the forces of nature to such an extent that with their help they would have no difficulty in exterminating one another to the last man.*

Sigmund Freud

When one thinks of the Holocaust perpetrator, perhaps one's mind immediately pictures familiar figures: Hitler; his small moustache, the extreme part in his hair, his eyes fiery as he preaches death to the Jews. Klaus Barbie, the “butcher” who used victims for useless, vicious medical experiments. Ralph Fiennes' character in *Schindler's List*; the Nazi who, from his villa balcony, indifferently shoots concentration camp inmates as they walk to and from their duties. However, the definition of perpetrator cannot be limited to only those extreme, obvious examples. What and who a perpetrator was could, and should be broader, and much subtler. A perpetrator could have been a neighbor who always smiled, a vendor with whom one did business, a member of the family. As we will see in the three texts discussed in this chapter, perpetrators did not fit any prescribed shape, size or description, but they do seem to share a similar trait: a willingness to sacrifice their family for the Nazi party.

Daniel Goldhagen reminds us that the definition of perpetrator is, and must be, much larger than a single, simple idea of pure and obvious evil. He defines a perpetrator as “anyone who knowingly contributes in some intimate way to the mass slaughter of Jews, generally anyone who worked in an institution of genocidal killing...[or] made their contributions to genocidal slaughter in many ways” (164-5), be those ways large or small.

A person did not have to commission or conduct the slaughter to be a perpetrator. Goldhagen takes great pains to remind us that not only are the concentration camp employees or Nazis of high regard considered perpetrators, but those who hastened the death of Jews in any capacity; “ordinary Germans,” often took part in the Final Solution.” That many Germans were passive bystanders can account for the fact that the Final Solution” was so terribly successful. By *not* taking action, many “ordinary” Germans participated in the murder of millions of people. In a similar vein, many people joined the Nazis not for malicious intent, but to gain power or prestige, and eventually found themselves committing various crimes in the name of the Reich. On that cue, enter John Halder, the protagonist of C.P. Taylor’s *Good*.

A professor of Literature at a university, a somewhat ordinary man struggling with a failing mother and a failing marriage, and impotence, Halder joins the Nazis for “job security” at the suggestion of his wife Helen<sup>8</sup>:

HELEN: Father phoned...he wants to speak with you. Tonight. The time is long past for being pure and self-righteous. For the sake of your children and me...you must make a definite decision to join the National Socialists...with your Army record, they’ll welcome you with open arms...Actually he heard from very high up. Goebbels has read your *Faust and Goethe in Weimar*.

HALDER: I was thinking about Hitler, on the way home.

HELEN: He’s right. You’ll get nowhere in the University now, unless you join the party, Johnnie. Father says you could even lose your lectureship...

HALDER: Listen you are not to leave me. You understand. Whatever it is. You and the kids. They’re the whole basis of my life. (Taylor, *Good* 21).

Helen's suggestion to join the Party seems quite innocent. If Halder wishes to move forward in his career, he should join. No mention is made of the moral implications of the

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<sup>8</sup> When ellipses are shown within excerpts from all the plays, they are part of the text. When I insert ellipses, I will bracket them.

decision just yet; it is seen only as a career move and a chance for advancement. Yet notice the words that Taylor uses: Helen notes that the “time is long past for being pure and self-righteous,” implying that to join the Nazis is “impure” yet socially-minded, thus sending a mixed message for those paying close attention. She also notes that Halder would go “nowhere” without the Nazis and that they would welcome him with “open arms;” a love unconditional, which, we learn later, is very important to Halder.

In this passage, we also become quite aware of Halder’s insecurity and near-panicked grasp on his family, with his seemingly unrelated answer to Helen’s comment “you may even lose your lectureship.” His family seems to be the reason for him to exist and a stable means of forming his identity, which, because of his family, will remain steady even if the Nazis for some reason reject him. Of course, they do not, and his fear of being left could also serve as a clue as to why his character joins the Nazis. They welcome him in with “open arms” and will never desert him; later, we learn that he indeed feels loved and needed by the Party, but feels he needs to *earn* that love: “They loved me, you see? I was an old soldier...and the Goethe man...if they love you like that, you can’t help loving them back” (Taylor 45)—by doing whatever they ask, it seems.

The Nazis very quickly become family—the family—for Halder. While this is happening, however, his link to Helen and the children is sacrificed. In a series of remarkably-timed coincidences, Halder soon meets young Anne, a student, with whom he falls irrationally in love. While it seems odd to link this event to his joining the Nazis, the timing seems to be “right” for Halder to begin a new life:

HALDER: ...She’s *rousing* me. Christ! She is! Where there’s life, there’s hope. I’ve always thought it was a major flaw in me. Love...I never thought it was in me to love...to really love. (Taylor 27)

Halder, eager for reassurance and acceptance, is awed to think that someone other than those he bore and married could find him lovable and lift him out of the impotence that has plagued him. Halder's identification between sexual attraction/arousal and love seems to illustrate that for Halder, "true" love is something that can be demonstrated and responded to physically. When he feels himself responding to Anne, he finds that he could indeed feel a deeper intertwined emotional commitment than he had felt with Helen. Soon after that realization, he moves farther down the path that will forever alter his life.

HALDER: Anne...I think I'd better tell you this. The past few months...you've been coming to me for seminars...what's happened is I've been getting emotionally attached to you.

ANNE: Have you? Honestly?

HALDER: I don't know how it happened. I have.

ANNE: (thrilled, putting her arms around Halder). John...I love you... I can't believe it...I love you...I've loved you for months...and you love me.

HALDER: I love you. (Taylor 28)

Halder seems to be heady on love—from the Nazis, from Anne. His promise to Helen and his plea that she never leave him are thrown aside, albeit with a fleeting thought to the gravity of his actions, as he speaks directly to the audience:

HALDER: I have a good wife...reasonably attractive...three first class children...a home...a growing reputation as a critic and a novelist...I'm on the brink of committing myself to the National Socialists and a completely new phase of my life...to get involved with an affair with a woman....you understand? What was I going to do? I had, in a couple of sentences, unleashed the flood-gates of a woman's heart, as Goethe might have said it... Two women loved me. In these days, that was a problem. My God! My children! What was going to become of them? Where could I go? Where would we live? Anne and I...in that sordid lodging house...it didn't even have a garden...I needed a garden. (Taylor 29)

His thought process is laid clear for us. Yes, he's concerned for a brief moment with what will happen to Helen and the children, but in many ways, he has already left her, and in two sentences, his thoughts turn to where he will take young Anne and what he will require in

living quarters. Between the lines “What could I do?” and “Where would we live?”, the decision is made, and quickly, a garden becomes more important than his previously essential family. As he moves emotionally and physically closer to Anne, he seems to find it easier to direct his attentions to what the Nazis ask of him, and away from the family that had served as his foundation. Helen and the three children are left behind, never referred to again, replaced by a more powerful family, the Nazi party and Anne.

Halder also faces another struggle with family and the expectations it carries. His mother, long ill from a thyroid deficiency, suicidal, and somewhat delusional, has become a cross that Halder is no longer willing or able to bear. In response to those feelings, he writes “out all the guilt in a pro-euthanasia novel” (Taylor 31), which he later claims is in the interest of “whatever abilities and talents I have for the betterment of the lives of the people around me” (Taylor 19). Exploiting his “altruistic” leanings, the Nazis put him in charge of creating a euthanasia program<sup>9</sup>. He is told that his “objectivity...combined with compassion and humanity” make him the ideal candidate for the task. While he eagerly accepts the assignment, Halder does note that “They [the Nazis] got me at a bad time: “With my mother in the state she got herself in...and the state I got in at her state...” (Taylor 31). This euthanasia program will function under the “approach to mercy killings of the incurable and hopelessly insane on the grounds of humanity and compassion” (Taylor 40). To keep him from questioning the motives of the Nazis, he is assured that his being involved will insure that the “whole question of humanity in the carrying out of this project

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix for a note on the actual man who created the Final Solution.



would never be lost from the initial stages of planning to the final implementation of the scheme” (Taylor 41).

Despite all the seemingly objective and humane terms that are bandied about by both the Nazi colonel and Halder, we, the audience, know that Halder (called by *New York Times* reviewer Walter Kerr a “human shrug,” for his willingness to bend to the will of others) is flattered into creating a program that will result in the killing of his own mother, without so much as a “reflection” on her fate (3).

Again, notice the language choices Taylor makes. While Halder is supposedly lulled by the flattering words used by Colonel Bouller to coerce him into taking the assignment—words such as “objectivity,” “humanity,” and “compassion,”—we also have words such as “scheme” whose dark connotations seemingly undermine the “goodness” or “purity” of the actions Halder is asked to perform. In hearing such benign terms linked with words that are less positive, the audience can begin to question how those seemingly positive terms are being used, and begin to sense the impending disintegration of Halder's soul.

For the love of the party—to be loved by a family that was, for whatever reason, preferable to the one he had had previously—Halder does this and increasingly terrible deeds. Halder, the literature professor, is ordered to arrange a book burning. For the Party, he justifies it as the response to a basic flaw in the University system: “One of the basic defects of university life is learning from *books*...Not from experience...life... *involvement...commitment*” (Taylor 54), rendering, in his mind, books as disposable replacements for real life. He participates in *Kristallnacht*, justifying the Nazi action as a

“humane action” to “wake up” all the Jews that are “deluding themselves” by staying in Germany, so that they will “run for their lives out of the country.”

Halder's mindset has changed a great deal from the beginning of the play. He states late in the play that he has “a whole scale of things that could worry me [...] the Jews and their problems...yes they are on it...but very far down, for Christ's sake” (Taylor 75). The man who at the beginning of the play would share black bread and conversation with his close Jewish friend Maurice is no longer willing to tolerate Jews, and views them as having brought on their fate. Whereas Maurice physically serves as Halder's “conscience” in the beginning of the play, often voicing the things that Halder would just as soon ignore, the Halder we see at the end of the play is able to silence Maurice's pleas for safe passage from Germany, and eventually live with the knowledge that Maurice died horrifically at the hands of the Nazis (being “gunned down with machine guns,” and having his “balls cut out” [Taylor 65]). Early on, Maurice had attempted to alert Halder to the evils of the Nazi Final Solution. His warnings were not heeded, as Halder was too entranced with Anne and unwilling to see the Final Solution as the deadly force that it would become. To Maurice's warning he replied that he loves “Jews...I'm attracted to their whole culture...Their existence is a joy to me” (Taylor 63). That sentiment obviously changes or gets deeply sublimated. The Maurice that, once dead, lives in Halder's mind even comes to see things Halder's way:

MAURICE: It's a standard process. Evolution, isn't it? Animals go as far along the line of development as they can. And that's it. They get too big, too heavy. Or too specialized. And then they go extinct. Don't worry about it. (Taylor 83)

At the end of the play, Halder is being transferred to a managerial position at Auschwitz, and has come to think about “objective moral truth,” saying that

What has happened is we have confused subjective fantasy concepts like good, bad, right, wrong, human, inhuman...as objective, immutable laws of the universe. Jews are bad, Germans are good. Like a stone falls to the ground...it is a moral act to get rid of the Jews. It's an immoral act. That's just clouded, subjective thinking parading as objective moral truth. (Taylor 84)

He, in the black uniform of the SS, is no longer recognizable to the audience, physically or morally, as the meek professor who was introduced at the beginning of the play. The man who believed that the Nazis wouldn't possibly try to exterminate all the Jews, is now actively taking part in the Final Solution. Perhaps in the final betrayal to the audience and himself, he has concluded that as long as he and Anne love each other, it will render them “good” people, somehow removed from the evil of the acts he perpetrates: “John, listen to me...whatever happens...round us[...] I know we're good people...both of us...”(Taylor 86).

The language that Taylor uses further illustrates Halder's moral fall from goodness. Words no longer have the same connotation that they did at the beginning of the play, and the audience must struggle to reconstruct their meaning inside a world of mirrors. Halder is indeed not a “good” person if the audience is to judge him by his actions, which we do. He is at least partially responsible for the deaths of his mother and his best friend. However, if judged on his words, which we cannot ultimately, he is still capable of placing himself on high moral ground. What is “moral” or “defective,” “objective” or “subjective,” or even “good” or “bad” can no longer be determined, if Halder's words and actions are juxtaposed. He is able at the end of the play to justify the killings because the Jews are “bad” and the

Nazis are “humane,” yet murderers in action. The contradictions between words and actions provide yet another means of illustrating Halder's metamorphosis from “normal” professor and family man to efficient “cog” in the elite Nazi “machine.” The transformation is complete.

At times, the transformation from man to monster is not as dramatic; at times, the perpetrator seems predisposed to be a killer. As noted in the introduction to this paper, the mindset of the German people and their desire for a better way of life preceding and during World War II promoted in many an unswerving and deadly “superpatriotism.” The Nazi party stressed the importance of the Führer and the Party over the family, often stating “first the Party, then the family,” with the family in many ways working to serve and strengthen the Party (Berger 26). The family unit also served the party by submitting to Nazi urgings for Aryan families to reproduce as quickly and prodigiously as possible, offering medals and monetary gifts when Aryan children were born. Of course, as with reality, things in *Stones*’ Burgdorf are rarely that cut and dried, as we will see. Exemplifying this ardent support and deadly patriotism is Ursula Hegi’s *Stones from the River* character of Helmut Eberhardt.

When we first meet Helmut, his mother Renate has brought the newborn to see the novel’s protagonist, Trudi Montag, and her father at the pay library. As Trudi held him,

she felt a chill that came from a place so deep within him that she no longer wanted to hold him; yet she was unwilling to return him to Frau Eberhardt because, all at once, she knew that he had the power to destroy his mother. She would feel it again in the years to come whenever she’d get near Helmut—that danger—though he was one of the most beautiful children in town... (Hegi 77)

As a young adult, Helmut joins the Nazis and is more than eager to do whatever the Party asks of him, believing Hitler's promises that "each worker would have bread, and that [Hitler] would lead the *Vaterland* to greatness, happiness and wealth" (Hegi 228).

"Consumed with a holy feeling he'd first known as an altar boy," Helmut participated in the arrest and torture of Jews who were former friends and neighbors (even hours before his wedding), and named his first-born son Adolf. He was expecting many children to follow, his wife proudly earning first the bronze, then later the gold cross of Aryan motherhood (Hegi 263, 275). By dedicating himself fully to the Nazis, he comes to believe that he and his decisions are superior and infinitely more rational than those of the people around him. Indeed, Hegi states that this character's unerring, unquestioning loyalty to the Nazis affords him the idea that he is a "better" (even a more "blessed") person than those around him who are not members of the Party, and to act on that belief. He thinks that his mother should sign the family house over to him and move to the smaller rooms upstairs so that he and his growing Aryan family can have the larger quarters. After her numerous refusals, he begins to believe that she is only being stingy with him, and thus defying him, his better judgment, and his "obvious justice in driving the Jews out of the country" (Hegi 274). That belief gradually, falsely, contorts itself into a fear that someone in the town will turn his mother in for her "love of Jews." He soon convinces himself that it is his obligation to turn her in before someone else can: "he realized that—although he couldn't turn her in for refusing him the house—he could certainly report her for spreading her dangerous ideas" (Hegi 275). After finally threatening her with arrest, Helmut expects her to "crumble" and give him the house. She refuses "as if he were not a family man but still a little boy" (Hegi 276), is arrested and never returns. Soon after his mother's arrest, Helmut moves his family

into the lower rooms he felt were his “right.” Outside, the pear tree from which Renate and her baby son had picked pears never bears edible fruit again; the metaphorical family tree withers.

When Renate Eberhardt is taken, the town reactions vary, but converge on a feeling of relief that it “wasn't them.” Many were glad they weren't Jewish, or that “At least they'd never said anything against the Führer—not openly that is.” And

the neighborhood women were grateful that their own children were not like Helmut Eberhardt, and they pitied his mother—not only for being betrayed by her son, but also for not having other children who'd certainly offset that guilt they were sure she must feel for having failed at motherhood. (Hegi 279)

Hegi writes that the community conveniently blamed Helmut's unswerving dedication to the party on his mother, not the party, keeping the town “safe” from questioning the righteousness of the Nazi regime, saving others from the danger of arrest. Once again as well, the language that Hegi employs further illustrates the discrepancy between actions and feelings, right and wrong. Those who were not caught defaming the Führer because they kept their comments to themselves, did illustrate a relief that they had kept their comments quiet, all the while placing themselves on a higher ground than Renate Eberhardt, because of her lack of children to compensate for Helmut.

Helmut, like Halder, willingly sacrificed one family for another “better” one, but Helmut wasn't as lucky as Halder: he died on the Front and never returned to the house for which he had sacrificed his mother. His literal family tree withered as well. Different from Halder as well is the pleasure that Helmut takes in serving the Nazis. He suffered no twinge of conscience, and did not need to rationalize or couch his actions in positivist language. While he did, like Halder, view himself as “good,” or in this case, “right” or “blessed,”

Helmut did not need to convince himself that what he was doing was the “path to righteousness.” Hegi created a character that simply knew that it was. Helmut’s family, unlike Halder’s Anne however, was not convinced. His wife refuses to call her son Adolf, opting for Adi<sup>10</sup>, and years after Helmut’s death, when she comes back to town after an extended stay away, mysteriously pregnant, this time with a girl, she names the child Renate, in an attempt to regain a sense of the family that Helmut’s actions had eliminated (Hegi 471).

Helmut is not the only perpetrator presented in *Stones*. One must not forget about the character of the butcher who kept a notebook on who was being a “good” German and who was supporting the “dirty” Jews (Hegi 240), or the fat priest who gave his Sunday service over to Nazi propaganda in the hopes of getting a car. As we noted in the introduction to this chapter, most, if not all, perpetrators did metaphorically bloody their hands to further the Nazi cause.

Later in the book, the family unit becomes vulnerable once again as the war ends. Hegi’s characters who were active perpetrators, as well as those who tacitly supported Nazi actions, found it especially difficult to reconcile the change of mindset from supporting Hitler during the War to realizing that that frame of mind is no longer accepted or rewarded after the war. When the Americans take over Burgdorf, Trudi finds families trying to reconstruct themselves:

Families welcomed their husbands and sons without daring to ask questions about what they’d done in the war. Since they didn’t want to believe that one of their own could have participated in the atrocities that the Americans

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<sup>10</sup> Note again the attempt to eradicate a sense of evil with language: Adi is an “innocent” name, Adolf carries with it negative connotations.

claimed had happened, they focused on healing the wounds, finding crutches for the crippled, feeding the hungry. They cut the SS and SA insignia from wartime photos, and when one of their men would wake from a nightmare, screaming so fiercely that even the neighbors would wake, there'd be a wife or mother or a sister who'd bend over him, cradle his head and murmur, "It's all over now." But of course it wasn't all over. (Hegi 447-8)

Families worked to mend any cracks in the unit by trying to forget what the Nazis had done and had their men do, choosing not to put their actions into words which then must be acknowledged. But the protagonist "Trudi would notice the fractures within families, the numbing that many of the soldiers only found with alcohol, the shame in the eyes of some wives when they walked at the arms of their husbands" (Hegi 449). While the town tried to forget the atrocities of war, Trudi, in many ways the town scribe, strives to remember, "not that she liked to remember any of it, but she understood that—whatever she knew about what happened—would be with her from now on, and that no one could escape the responsibility of having lived in this time" (Hegi 450), be they perpetrators, victims or bystanders.

Denial, excuses and lies became the way to escape responsibility and prosecution for Hegi's citizens of Burgdorf: "[Some] swore that they'd joined the *Partei* out of fear for their lives, or because they'd been forced to in order to enter their profession or be promoted...once in the *Partei*, of course, they'd been afraid not to comply because they would have been sent to a KZ [concentration camp]" (Hegi 459). For, of course, if they had resisted the Nazis, they said, they would have been killed. No mention however, was made by these characters, of the enthusiasm with which they obeyed and supported the Nazis. An American stationed in Burgdorf after Germany's surrender noted ironically that "your entire country—was filled—with undercover—freedom fighters" (Hegi 460).



As we have already noted, people had hidden any derogatory comments about Hitler when those comments could put them in danger of imprisonment, or worse. After the war, antisemitic comments were those that were whispered: “The Jews were being treated like royalty [while] ordinary people like them were still persecuted, questioned about their political beliefs, although they’d had no idea what had really been going on in the KZs till after the war, and then they’d been shocked, no—horrified” (Hegi 460). Notice Hegi’s use of language. Those who supported Hitler were ordinary, even victims. Jews were not persecuted, “ordinary” people are, even those who had been “horrified” about the events in the KZs. What remains an unstated question is whether they were legitimately horrified, or whether they stated they were horrified in an attempt to escape punishment. Language, it seems, goes a long way to aid the changing of roles; those who were bystanders or perpetrators, or “the right” during the War, suddenly are on shaky ground, and they seem to hope that their use of language will work to help them to justify their actions.

While some citizens of Burghdorf may have helped in persecuting the Jews, when confronted with their actions, they attempt to convince themselves, and others, that they were morally disgusted by the actions of the Nazis. For “most didn't like to think back on Hitler, and if they spoke about him at all, it would be to tell you they hadn't liked what had gone on. Their allegiance to one powerful leader now became their excuse; since they had not made decisions but merely obeyed orders, they were not to blame” (Hegi 473). Goldhagen's “ordinary Germans,” this time, characters in the fictional Burghdorf, found themselves having to justify the passion with which they had followed Hitler.

When characters like Halder and Helmut worked so diligently for the Nazi cause, it seems an obvious statement that the antisemitic state of mind that had been ingrained so

deeply did not disappear with the close of the war; those who were still alive could not change their mindsets so quickly. And it can be argued that there was no reason to stop believing in the “right” of the Nazis. They had only lost the War, they had not been proven wrong. Like the resistance during the war, antisemitism went underground. Julia Pascal’s *A Dead Woman on Holiday* illustrates the obvious reality that antisemitism didn’t die with Hitler. A female guard’s soliloquy during the Nuremberg trials illustrates this most vividly.

They blame us, but they’ll soon forget. There will be other wars, others will be killed. The removal of the Jews will be forgotten. People will ask, why are the Jews always talking about that? Why can’t they just forget about it? Why can’t the Jews just shut up?...it’s not our fault...Look at what the Americans did to the Indians. Look at what Americans did with the slaves. Well, the blacks are only good for work; giving them freedom was the biggest mistake. But the Jews are inferior to the Negro race. The Jews brought about the downfall of the Roman Empire. They are to blame for the Armistice of 1918 and the Versailles treaty. All Jews are untrustworthy. It’s a pity any are left alive. Hitler didn’t live long enough to finish the job. They’ll cause trouble as long as they live. (Pascal 28)

As illustrated above, the vehemence of emotion felt by those who supported Hitler did not wane when the crimes were brought to the attention of the law and the world, it merely became covert and whispered, as it had been most of the time before Hitler exploited it for his purposes in 1933. Note too the depth and breadth of the antisemitic belief that Pascal captures vividly. To those who followed Hitler, Jews are responsible for a great deal of the evils in history. In the eyes of those who continue to believe in the righteousness of antisemitism, they are the *perpetrators* who, with a long history of alleged destruction, will continue to bring their evil influence to the world around them. Germany’s loss in the War didn’t change the feelings, only how they were expressed. The works examined in this chapter seem to illustrate the danger of being swept away by the excitement of patriotism. Complacency and the rationalization of actions that would be found repulsive at any other

time are not to be accepted. Morality, it seems these authors are saying, is non-negotiable and should not be sacrificed in an attempt to please a superior. Holocaust fiction has served to continue and broaden the conversation, as these authors have provided powerful means of looking at the role of the perpetrator.

As we have seen, the family unit has been shown to be vulnerable to, a victim of, the obedience and loyalty of those who actively or quietly supported Hitler. Even when the whole family shared the beliefs of the Nazis, they were vulnerable to the ramifications of those beliefs, and suffered the consequences of those beliefs. The family, as was noted in the Introduction, is only mythically impervious to destruction. In reality, and in fiction, the family is very vulnerable to the whims, desires, and ambition of one of its members. Both characters John Halder and Helmut Eberhardt willingly throw over their biological family for the more desirable family that the Nazi party provides, resulting in dismissal at the most benign, to death at the most extreme, in the family.

As we move to the next chapter, we will move to examining how the more tragic role of the victim affects the family, and perhaps broadens the idea of what a victim is or can be.

## CHAPTER 3. VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES

*The same ashes will cover all of us:  
 The tulip—a wax candle flickering in the wind  
 The swallow in its flight, sick of too many clouds  
 The child who throws his ball into eternity—  
 And only one will remain, a poet—*

Abraham Sutzkever

*I am twenty-four  
 led to slaughter  
 I survived*

Tadeusz Rozewicz

It would be very easy to say that the only victims of the Holocaust were those who were the “intended” victims; those who were interred in the camps and killed. However, that view is too narrow in scope. Granted, the Jews were the largest and most obvious group that suffered. But what of those who died or were killed before they made it to the camps? Or those who emigrated before it was too late? Are they not still victims of persecution? And what of those who were “ordinary (Aryan) Germans,” punished because they didn’t like what they saw in Hitler’s Final Solution, and acted upon their belief that the actions of the Nazis were morally wrong? In the works that we will be analyzing, we will see that those who fell victim to the Nazi’s Final Solution did not fit only one category, or even suffer to the same degree. As Sutzkever’s poem “War” above notes, “the same ashes will cover all of us.”

As a means of “setting the stage” for what we are about to analyze, let us examine some of the means that very human victims used in hopes of surviving the Holocaust—reuniting with their families after the war—and the effect that the Holocaust had on the individual victim and his/her family. There was no standard reaction to the Holocaust. Psychologists Sigel and Wienfeld noted that survivor parents, be they Jewish or otherwise,

exemplified a series of extremes. They were either “excessively involved” with their children or distant. They were either controlling or preoccupied. Children were noted to be either rebellious or overly dependent on their parents (88). After the war, survivors maintained high expectations for their children; the children were expected to compensate for numerous losses or serve as connections between their parents and the “real world” (Hass 33).

As mentioned briefly earlier, a poignant victim of the Holocaust was the family unit. Not only were whole families eliminated; often only one member of a large extended family survived. In those cases, William Neiderlander’s 1964 study proclaimed there to be a “survivor’s syndrome” which included “chronic anxiety, fear of renewed persecution...psychosomatic disorders, the inability to experience pleasure...the inability to concentrate...hallucinations and depersonalization,” as well as difficulty establishing any close relationships (Hass 8-9). As we have already seen, even those who supported Hitler suffered a tremendous loss of life and destruction of the family. When the family did survive, often the aftermath of the Holocaust took its toll yet again. Paul Marcus and Alan Rosenberg outline many of the symptoms that manifested themselves after the Holocaust, including “survivor’s guilt,” depression, emptiness, loss, fatigue, sleeplessness, social withdrawal, as well as “hate addiction” (26). Both survivors and their children were considered a higher suicide risk (Sigel 106). Children of survivors tended to display the same characteristics, with the added burden of separation anxiety and the inability to talk about their struggles with their incommunicative parents (32).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Speigelman’s *Maus* for a poignant nonfiction illustration of the struggles between parent and child as they attempt to understand each other.

As this information illustrates, maintaining the family ties during and after the war was tremendously difficult and took its toll on the victim psychologically. If the family did survive, the rebuilding process was never easy. The family members were persecuted, and actions they took in response had their ramifications and reverberations upon the family and the self, both positive and negative. We shall see illustrations of the extent to which the victim and his/her family suffered varied with each case, yet they shared something, in that suffering. Shared experiences, or family ties, could be the basis on which to begin to rebuild.

We shall, aptly enough, begin at the beginning of the war. In Joanna Kraus' *Remember My Name*, we meet young Rachel Simon living in Marseilles, the Free Zone, when the Germans are invading. Things are changing quickly; "...I saw a big sign, 'No Jews Allowed.' Maman, it wasn't there yesterday" (13). Knowing that no good can come of the invasion, her father decides that it is in her best interest to send Rachel away so she can be safe and have an increased chance of surviving the war:

LEON: "...say "My name is Madeleine Petit."

RACHEL: "My name is Madeleine Petit." But why, Papa? My name's Rachel Simon. Who's Madeleine Petit?

LEON: As of five o'clock—you are!

RACHEL: But that's lying. You told me never to lie.

LEON: The world's just turned upside down. When it's right side up, we can live again-and stop lying. For now you must forget you were ever Rachel Simon. (Kraus 16)

With no warning, and without her parents, Rachel is prepared to be sent to St. Laurent des Pins, even as her mother begs to keep the family together. Leon, who, it seems, has been planning this for some time, notes that "the only way to survive is to separate" (Kraus 18), seemingly saying that to save the family, it needs to be split up; the family is not stronger

than its representative parts. Leon begs Rachel to never divulge her real name for if she does, “you’re dead.” The family must also rationalize their actions by noting that “the world has been turned upside down.” Lying becomes an acceptable thing to do, when the world is not as it should be.

For obvious reasons, the idea of sending Rachel away, alone, causes great strife between mother and father:

PAULINE: It isn't right

LEON: The whole war isn't right.

PAULINE: I only have one child.

LEON: And I will do anything to save her!

PAULINE: What if something happens to her?

LEON: Did you forget what happened to our neighbors in Paris? The reasons we ran?

PAULINE: Why St. Laurent des Pins?

LEON: I told you, they will never let a child go hungry.

PAULINE: Leon, can't we decide this tomorrow?

LEON: Tonight, there's confusion. Easier for her to escape. And wait for what? They took our business. They took our home. They're not going to take our daughter. (Kraus 19)

With little to no thought to the future, worrying only about the present moment, Leon tries to assure Pauline that Rachel will live an “ordinary” life (whatever that is), even without her parents, without the grounding framework of the family. After one last recitation of the Sabbath blessing, Rachel is sent off with directions to find the village priest or schoolteacher once in St. Laurent des Pins, because those people would never let a child “go hungry.” As she leaves, she holds forged papers that were bought with her father’s grandfather's watch, which had been of great sentimental importance, but became a means of currency, its sentimental value denied and ignored; the reminders of the family are sacrificed for a means of survival.

Once on the train, and truly on her own, Rachel/Madeleine is befriended by a Jesuit priest who delivers her to the door of a Madame Marie-Therese Barbière, who, after some convincing, will be Rachel/Madeleine's "family" for the remainder of the war, even though it means putting herself at risk of arrest or worse. This seems to fill a void for her (providing the semblance of a family), as well as providing Rachel with a home:

MARIE-THERESE: We were never blessed with a child. But there's a time in life for everything. Père Antoine, I can't hide her, but...but...but my husband's cousin could come for a visit couldn't she? And she could go to school with the other girls, couldn't she? And in the evening she could learn to make lace. (Kraus 46)

Again, Kraus uses language as a means to justify actions that would normally be dangerous or immoral, but whose motivations are starkly different. Mme. Barbière is no longer hiding Rachel—Rachel is her cousin who is visiting, creating a false family for means of keeping Rachel safe. Because Rachel is a cousin who is visiting, she can have a "normal" childhood and go to school. Unlike Taylor's Halder, who used language to justify his descent into the evils of the Third Reich, Kraus' Mme. Barbière and Rachel use language to survive the evils that the Final Solution would impose upon them. They share company as Mme.

Barbière teaches Madeleine how to make lace:

MARIE-THERESE: Lace making requires sharp eyes, careful fingers, and patience. While you work on each tiny piece you have to see the whole design in your head.

RACHEL: We had a lace tablecloth...once. It was for Sh...holidays. Maman said one day when I got married, it would be mine. But...but...but now it's gone.

MARIE-THERESE: Well, then you must make your own. Just like the girls do here... (Kraus 43)

As Rachel/Madeleine is careful to mask her Jewish-ness in generic terms (holidays for Sabbath), we see Mme. Barbière begin to accept her as a part of her household.



As her character adjusts to her life and begins school, Rachel/Madeleine learns that all is not safe, even in the isolated, snow-bound, St. Laurent des Pins. A Nazi official, Hans Schmidt detains her, for mailing a letter for a stranger.

RACHEL: I've told you. I was on my way home from school, and he was sweeping the snow from the Town Hall steps. He just asked me if I'd mail this letter for him, because he wasn't allowed to leave.

HANS: Then you admit you spoke to him!

RACHEL: Yes.

HANS: That alone is a crime! (Kraus 55)

After Rachel/Madeleine lies to protect the man who asked her to mail the letter, Hans reminds her not to speak to strangers: "I'm talking to you just like a father...AREN'T I?" (Kraus 57). She reluctantly agrees, and is let go, having taken her real father's words to heart, that in this "upside-down world," lying to protect someone is acceptable. She also clings to the knowledge that this Nazi is nothing like the father she remembers, and reminding her again that she is far away from the family that she holds most dear. She strives to fit in with her new surroundings, yet cling to the memory and hope of her family.

Rachel and Mme. Barbière are able to receive news of Marseilles as Suzanne, the young schoolteacher, becomes involved with Julian, a resistance worker:

RACHEL: Marseilles! Please! Please tell me about Marseilles!

JULIAN: It's not for young ears.

RACHEL: Please! I must know. I must!

SUZANNE: Tell us, Julian.

JULIAN: You want the real news. Here! Read it in *our* paper, the *Maquisard*. They sent me down to write a story, conditions since the French surrender...There's no food in Marseilles. Except the black market. I saw a woman take off her wedding band to buy a slice of bacon...They're arresting Jews in Marseilles....They're going house to house, alley to alley, hunting them down. And they're arresting anyone who hides them. Anyone who gives them food, anyone who helps (Kraus 69-70)

Rachel learns that things are very bleak for her parents, that most likely they have been arrested, and that her father was not the only one to give cherished heirlooms away for the basics of survival. But the worst is yet to come:

JULIAN: ...But I found out about the...so-called labor camps...in Poland, where they send—

MARIE-THERESE: Not in front of the child.

JULIAN: Then read it for yourselves later (Kraus 71)

Rachel does read the paper, much to her horror. The newspaper states “Mass murder report confirmed. Jews told they would be sent to live in a resettlement area are selected for hard labor. Or death. Either way, few survive. For them the only new country is heaven, not Poland. Families torn—” (Kraus 73). Rachel is torn just by what she read. While before the news she had lived with the belief that her parents were somehow fine, she must now live with the idea that they are not fine, but perhaps in great danger, or suffering in one of the camps she has just read about. Whereas she had been able to put aside the dangers of war for a brief while, she is no longer able to because of her knowledge that her family is targeted for elimination.

Months pass and the war ends. Julian is freed from prison and he and Suzanne plan to marry. As they attempt to start a new life after the War, Rachel waits only for her parents to return for her:

MARIE-THERESE: She’s been like that ever since the war ended. Standing by the window, hour after hour. For ten days. I don’t know what to do.

RACHEL: They said they’d come! As soon as the war was over! They promised!

JULIAN: Some promises can’t be kept.

RACHEL: I won’t listen to you!

MARIE-THERESE: Madeleine, there are some things in life we must accept...

JULIAN: Madeleine, not everyone comes back.

RACHEL: They'll come! I know they will. (Kraus 103)

No matter how difficult it may be to accept, Rachel is unwilling to acknowledge that her parents did not survive the war, she clings fervently to the idea of regaining the family that she has been separated from for so long. Fortunately, that same day, Leon arrives.

*Leon stands there, gaunt, gray-haired. His clothes are army hospital surplus. He is a shattered man, a shadow of himself.*

LEON: I'm looking for Madeleine Petit. They said Madame Barbière's house[...]I'm her father....

SUZANNE: She has been waiting by the window, hoping her maman and papa would come.

LEON: I've come alone.

RACHEL: Papa? Papa! I knew you'd come. They said—but I knew you'd come. Maman.

LEON: She's not there.

RACHEL: Where is she?[...]Papa where is she?[...] Papa! Tell me!

LEON: Typhus. She died of typhus in the camp.

RACHEL: No! Not Maman! NOT MAMAN. Maybe she escaped. Maybe—

LEON: You can't understand. You weren't there. There was only one escape.

RACHEL: I made a lace tablecloth just for her. And every evening, as soon as the first star appeared, I said goodnight. Just the way we said we would.

She can't be dead. She can't be. Why didn't you stop her?[...] I hate them! I HATE THEM! I HATE THEM!

LEON: Hating won't bring her back. (Kraus 107)

She learns that her parents had been in a concentration camp (Kraus 108), that the horrors that Julian's newspaper had told of had touched those closest to her. Without her mother, she and her father confirm that they are still a family even if it is not complete; the concept of family still has meaning to them. While she hates those who hurt her family, she is told that it is pointless to hate. Rachel gains back her father, while maintaining her adopted family, as well. Rachel will help Leon to shake the sadness brought on by his war experiences, and her other family will help both of them to become a family again. In the end, Rachel takes back her name: "It's over, Papa! The war's over. We can stop hiding! I

can have my name back! My own name! RACHEL SIMON!” (Kraus 110). The family is not exactly as it was before the war, and Rachel and her father must rebuild what remains of their family, from the ashes of the Holocaust. They must also learn again how to communicate. Her father has suffered incredibly, and Rachel has “grown up” while in St. Laurent des Pins. They have to renegotiate their relationship to include all the experiences they have had while separated and rediscover what it means to be a family, even incomplete. (We shall see in *A Shayna Maidel* that the rebuilding process is far from easy.) But as they are determined to do so, and have each other to hold on to, their family can serve as a basis for renewal. The idea of being a family can be as helpful as *being* a family can be.

As was noted in the introduction to this chapter, victims of the Holocaust could not only be Jews but also “ordinary Germans.” Such is the case in *Stones from the River*. Before the War reaches Burgdorf, we get to know the character of Eva Rosen. For a brief time in their childhood, they shared an idyllic friendship. Trudi, who had never known the idea of a complete family because of her mother’s early death, loved “quickly and rashly,” and saw her love for her classmate wax and wane in a heartbeat. Trudi even sat next to Eva at school, whose “spine [was] so straight that she was always held up as an example for good posture” (Hegi 91). Being a *zwerg* or dwarf, Trudi was often teased by her classmates, but her new dog Seehund served as a means for Eva and Trudi to become friends, as Trudi fought for an connection that would resemble the mythically unbreakable ties of the family. Eva, whose parents remain in the shadows of the novel, confessed her fear of cats, because “they find your warm spots and choke you,” while Trudi shared the pictures hanging in her house of her dead mother, and made up fantastic stories to keep Eva from leaving her, as

people so often did. While Eva ignored Trudi at school, she would come in the afternoons to walk Seehund. Eventually, Eva's fondness for Trudi shows itself in front of the other children, as she runs her fingers through Trudi's hair at a piano recital, and Eva is ostracized. The friendship ends for a time (Hegi 124-7). As time passes, Eva gains the status of a distant, perfect being, with whom Trudi was close for a brief time, and always wished to be again.

We learn that, years later, as things in Hegi's Burgdorf have become very different, Eva, a Jew, married young Alexander Sturm, a non-Jew, a month before the Nuremberg laws would render their union illegal. Their love would prove to be their downfall. Whereas they were usually strong, levelheaded individuals, they found that they were unable to love each other rationally. Though they were both serious and polite, they were extravagant in their expressions of love, often kissing passionately in public, and celebrating in the face of growing dread of the Nazis. Some said those displays were because she was Jewish: "it was known that Jews had huge appetites when it came to pleasures of the flesh" (Hegi 232). Her parents make plans and escape, but Eva refuses because Alexander won't go with them; she chooses one form of family over another. We read that her parents are not heard from again.

When she is taken in for questioning by the Nazis, in the disappearance of her parents, Alexander fancies himself strong enough to go with her if she is arrested and deported, but agrees that she should go into hiding even though he admits to being selfish and "wanting her so badly." True to the nature of their love, she is very reluctant to be away from Alexander, but finally agrees that she will hide in a basement shelter that Trudi, her father and their neighbors had constructed. Though she misses him madly, she is quiet for a

brief time. After many months, however, she begs to visit Alexander, if only to “sleep with him for one night,” because then she could handle anything that was sent her way; her need for her family proves stronger than her need for safety:

“I’m going home,” she said, her voice clipped.

“You know it’s not wise.”

“I also know I can’t go on like this. Sometimes I forget that you’re my friend...all I see is my jailer.”

“Eva—”

“People can die. You’ve seen how quickly it happens. The Weskopp boy—”

“He was in war.”

“Alexander might be sent off to war any day.”

“It’s not his life I’m worried about.”

“One short night, Trudi. One Goddamn beautiful night. Is that too much to want?”

“To want? Of course not, but—”

“If I can have one night with Alexander, I know I’ll be able to deal with the hiding again.”

“It’s not worth it, Eva.”

“How can you say that?”

“At least talk to my father.”

“There’s nothing he can say that will keep me here.” (Hegi 365-6)

Hegi writes that Eva’s love for Alexander undermines her usual rationality and brings forth her weakness, as she justifies her need because it will strengthen her. Like the perpetrator Halder, she also conflates sex with love, and feels that if she spends one night with him, all will be well, because that is the one way she can show him how much she loves and misses him. However, Eva never returns. She is taken that night, as Alexander, who’d thought himself brave enough to go with her should she be taken, crawled on the floor of their “too new” attic, quivering, not knowing if he loved or hated her:

Afterwards, though for not long, Alexander would try to tell himself that his legs failed him when he tried to stand up as they took Eva away, stand up to join her as she must have believed he would—even during her last gesture of heroism—because that was what they had promised one another. (Hegi 370)

It seems clear that Alexander's love for Eva does not extend to endangering himself, even though he had accompanied her when she had been taken in for questioning before. That one incident perhaps had drained him of his courage, for he was unable to fight the Nazis as they took away his wife. Unlike Eva, his love of his family is not stronger than his need for personal safety. In that one moment, we see him sacrifices his family for himself<sup>12</sup>.

Trudi, too, often wonders why Alexander wasn't taken with Eva, and "since he didn't explain himself, he'd lost his reputation [in Burgdorf] for being a decent man" (Hegi 399). But contrary to popular belief, he is not adjusting to what had happened. He begins to obsess about that night. As thoughts of his wife take him over, he is forced to relive again and again his shame when the Nazis taunted him for being "some hero." Alexander becomes less able to function, returning from his duty on the front lines, without leave, on what would have been their ninth wedding anniversary. He showers, dresses in his "good blue suit" and climbs the stairs to the attic.

"I should have come with you and your parents," he said aloud.

Only silence confronted him.

"I used to believe I'd go with you into exile, death even...I'm ready for that now...."

"Even if you are in the worst of places, I would rather be with you than here by myself. Even if you are dead, it would be better to be dead with you...."

"Don't you see?" he whispered. "I never meant to break my promise."

He remembered Jutta pulling him to his feet after the Gestapo had left him behind, remembering her strong arms as she'd led him down the stairs to his apartment, where she'd wrapped blanket after blanket around him because his body wouldn't stop shaking.

"I was too late, Eva. A few minutes more—and I would have been able to get up. I wanted to come with you. You have to believe me." (Hegi 432-4)

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<sup>12</sup> Benigni's film *Life is Beautiful* illustrates the opposite. The protagonist's wife begs to be put on the train to the work camp, to be closer to her family.

He regrets his inaction, although his words belie his still-alive fear of being taken to the “worst of places”: “just a few more minutes and I would have been able to get up.” Despite (or because of) his fear, death is preferable to life without Eva, his family. Apparently for Alexander, taking his own life is easier than being taken by and suffering under the Nazis. Because he convinces himself that Eva is waiting for him in another, safe place, all the

anguish and shame he'd suffered for so long spun away and still, still, he was allowed to keep the wisdom that had come from his torment as he stepped into her arms. Her skin smelled of summer, and was wonderfully soft under his hands, and it occurred to him that, certainly this was as much happiness as one human could bear, almost too much for one single heart to contain without bursting. (Hegi 434-5)

He jumps from the attic window to his death, feeling that once again he has the approval of the town that had disapproved of his lack of action at that pivotal moment. While the Nazis took Eva, the Jew, her husband, an “ordinary German” whose inaction brought him such grief, found himself also a victim of the Final Solution. His love for his family served as a double indemnity: it was not strong enough to prompt him to go with Eva, yet was too strong to allow him to live without her.

Eva and Alexander are not the only victims of the Holocaust in Hegi's fictional Burgdorf. Frau Abramowitz, a Jew whom Trudi had also known all her life, insists that “it's important to keep forgiving,” and makes excuse after excuse to stay in town, as she eventually loses her hat shop and her husband is tortured. She gives her and her husband's passports to the government when they ask for them, all in her *anpassungsfähigkeit*, willingness to adapt, “until nothing is left”: she appears to sacrifice her family in an attempt to save it, because dignity is more important than safety. It is possible, as well, that her willingness to adapt is based on a belief that surely the Nazis wouldn't attempt to kill all the



Jews, and if she cooperates, she will spare her family a horrible punishment. She, of course, is proven wrong, as her husband is beaten severely, and later dies, and she, after a bout of tremendously exploded rage, is eventually sent away (Hegi 263-430).

Other residents of Burgdorf find themselves victims of the Final Solution. Frau Simon, a Jew and friend of the family for all of Trudi's life, "received an official notification from the SS that she was to be relocated. She was instructed to bring food for three days, one suitcase weighing no more than fifty kilos, one backpack or travel bag, and one roll of blankets" (Hegi 310), which we, as post-Holocaust readers, know she will not get to keep. We learn later that she is being held in Poland. Neighbors, her metaphorical family, who have the courage to resist take up the cause to send her food, clothing and medicine (Hegi 309-10), yet she never returns.

Jews, as noted, were not the only ones condemned for death or suffering at the hands of the Nazis. The "weak, deformed and retarded" or "eaters" were soon targeted, as one mother screamed that her retarded, institutionalized son indeed might have to die one day, "*But not like this,*" and not before "his time" (Hegi 310). Hegi has Trudi herself be a victim to a smaller degree in two ways. After stating, not-so-quietly, her dislike for the Nazis, she is imprisoned for nearly six weeks, before being freed by an unlikely ally, an SS officer with "cold eyes" who nonetheless, lets her go with a stern warning she be very careful what she says, that "her kind" were being killed (Hegi 377-84). Later, her only lover, her only hope for a family besides her ailing father, is killed in the bombing of Dresden. Because of her life experience of having loved ones spurn her, she spends the rest of her life missing him and wondering if he is truly dead or if he had deserted her, and waiting for him to return; she never learns his fate.

Similarly, Frau Weiler, not Jewish, rushes to save a small Jewish girl from being stoned in front of her grocery store and is arrested for “attacking six children.” She is jailed for a week, and many speculate that she “must have some Jew blood in her,” because of her willingness to help the defenseless young girl; to serve, in a way, as a mother (Hegi 210).

In many ways too, the town becomes a victim of the Final Solution, as it is divided between those who support Hitler and those who do not. Open, friendly relationships become strained or non-existent, as beliefs and actions divide the town. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the town struggled greatly in its attempt to rebuild, to re-form its family ties.

The families in *Stones* illustrate the various ways in which the Holocaust had an effect. It could be profound, as in the rift between Eva and Alexander, or more insidious as shown in the jailing of Frau Weiler. The victims in these instances were not entirely the historically victimized Jews nor the other traditionally persecuted groups. Eva, a Jew, is sent away, ripped from her family, but so are “ordinary Germans” Frau Weiler, and Trudi’s lover. The family suffers to various degrees, more often from having a family member ripped from its fold, with no means of rebuilding. Unlike the perpetrators who willingly sacrifice the family, no choice is given in these cases, save perhaps the split-second choice to act. Both Alexander and Frau Weiler could have chosen to act differently, but they did not, and their lives were changed, irrevocably. Both met the same end, but by dramatically, morally different means.

In Barbara LeBow's *A Shayna Maidel*, we move to the time immediately after the War, as we meet a family which is reunited after the Holocaust. Two members of the family, Mordechai and Rose (Americanized from Rayzel) had managed to escape to

America before escape became impossible. Mordechai's wife and eldest daughter, Luisa, were unable to leave, being too ill to travel. When we meet Rose, we discover that she is thoroughly "American," shunning the traditions of the Jewish faith and embracing the freedoms and wealth of America. Mordechai clings to the "Old World" ways of Poland and often clashes with his free-willed daughter. Luisa comes to America after the War, speaking very little English, in an attempt to gather the strings of her family back together, perhaps in an attempt to heal the wounds left by the Holocaust. Right away, we see the extreme effects of the Holocaust on the family, as Mordechai and Luisa compare notes regarding family member's fates and locations, and Rose struggles to grasp the enormity of a situation of which she was ill aware, having only seen the newsreels:

MORDECHAI: You know, I got a big family in Poland. The Greenspans was the only ones here before me. Mine mama and *taten* was both dead before I leave Poland. I wrote down others, all I could remember, so I don't forget. Some, I find out what happens from this organization, or that and from Greenspan, maybe. Some I don't know yet.  
 LUISA. I got list like you. The same. (LeBow 34)

And they begin to compare their findings, with Luisa able to put a date and place of death for many relatives that Mordechai was unable to locate:

MORDECHAI. Artur and Salek Elias, nephews. Sons *fun* Betta Weiss Elias.  
 LUISA. Artur Elias, dead. Murdered, Maidenek concentration camp, nineteen and forty-two. Salek Elias, dead. Killed in battle, Warsaw, nineteen and forty-three, April. (LeBow 35)

This litany of death continues on as the relation between the dead and Mordechai and Luisa grows closer:

MORDECHAI. Pesah Weiss, sister.  
 LUISA. Pesha Weiss. Murdered. Auschwitz, nineteen and forty three.  
 MORDECHAI. Karol and Jankwa Eisenman, mother-in-law and father-in-law.

LUISA. Karol and Janka Eisenman. Murdered. Belzek. Nineteen and forty-two.

MORDECHAI. Your mother, may she rest in peace, I know what happened—

ROSE. But I don't! Why won't you tell me how she died Papa? Luisa?

MORDECHAI. It's enough to know she died in such a place.

ROSE. And all the others. So many! Names you never told me, Papa.

MORDECHAI. They're dead.

LUISA. *Ois geharget*. Murdered. (LeBow 35)

Finally Mordechai thinks the list is finished; his wife is a sacrifice that he has adjusted to, no more discussion is needed. Rose is left wondering what happened, and no one is willing to fill her in. But Luisa has two final names to add, names that shock Mordechai and Rose.

LUISA. Duvid Pechenik, husband to Luisa Weiss Pechenik, son-in-law of Mordechai Weiss, arrested, Chernov, Poland, nineteen hundred and forty. Sprinze Pechenik, daughter of Duvid Pechenik and Luisa Weiss Pechenik, *ainikl*—granddaughter—to Mordechai Weiss. Murdered. Auschwitz, nineteen hundred and forty-three. (LeBow 36)

The audience hears of the most poignant losses at the end of the list; losses that Mordechai wasn't expecting, in Luisa's missing husband and murdered child. The seemingly endless list of those killed demonstrates vividly and poignantly the depth of the effect of the Holocaust on the family, as most of Mordechai's family, except for Luisa, has been killed. Any sense of reference Mordechai had to his "Old World" has been eliminated and his daughters are his only remaining, living, family. But Rose is different from him; she is thoroughly American and Luisa is a stranger, leaving Mordechai very alone, yet wanting even more to maintain control of his daughters in an attempt to re-establish the family as he has known it. We also see a brief flash of the very real difference between being dead and being murdered, a not entirely un-ironic "lifetime."

Rose, having been blissfully ignorant to much of what happened in Europe, finds herself having to struggle with her growing knowledge of the horrors of the Holocaust (from which she escaped) and the questions that accompany that continuing disbelief. In many ways, history is living with her now, in Luisa, who serves as a photo-negative image of her life; she gloried in childhood and freedom, while Luisa suffered in ways Rose will never know. Her growing horror is accompanied by a disgust at the idea that Mordechai and Luisa seem too blasé about the casualties:

ROSE. Lists. Lists! Your list, Papa's list. Like taking inventory of dry goods. Then all through dinner, not a word out of place. Not a tear. Not a sigh. Papa is stone. But I'm not a baby and I want to know what happened. I see pictures in the newspapers I can't believe. And in the newsreels. I couldn't look but I wanted to see. Is that what it was really like? Was my mother in one of those pictures? Were you? You're my family, tell me!

LUISA. I cannot talk it. About it. Is all of living and dying. Is too much from the ...the *bainer*.

ROSE. Bones.

LUISA. The bones. The *hartz*. The *flaish*. I want not to talk it no more. Ok?

ROSE. Not even about Mama?

LUISA. About Mama, I tell you this...how was her life. Almost happy, only except missing you. She was beautiful, skin like silk. Smooth and smells always from clean, like soap. And say all the time things... words...

ROSE. Sayings.

LUISA. Sayings to make things be better. She makes me laugh, and Hanna, my friend too. She sings, not too good, like me. And cooks good, a lot, like you. She has dead in dreams, has dreams in head forever. Things no matter how bad, be going better soon, says Mama. And just like Papa, whatever happens is the will of God.

ROSE. Even after—

LUISA. Every day. The Will of God. So that's Mama. What I remember. This I can tell you. (LeBow 38-9)

Rose is forced to accept that Luisa feels that there is no language to address what she experienced in Europe: words that cannot bring anyone back, or even do justice to the memory. It can also be suggested that if Luisa were more adept at English, she would be

better able to share her experiences with Rose. But Luisa's English is stilted and basic and only frustrates her as she attempts to communicate with Rose.

Rose's self-righteous resistance to the list as an "inventory of dry goods" is countered by her admission that she "was unable to look, but wanted to see" what the (arguably sanitized) newsreels showed. Would she be able to function knowing all that Luisa saw and experienced? It seems doubtful. Sensing perhaps that her sister would not know what to do with the knowledge of her mother's death might play a role in Luisa's reluctance to tell Rose much. Words, as Elie Weisel stated, cannot express the horrors of the camps, and are doubly damned in the face of a seemingly willing ignorance of what happened in the camps. Luisa could also be attempting to save Rose some of the horror that she had to face. But, in the reality of their situation, she is driving a wedge between her inquisitive sister and herself, helping Rose to feel more distant from her already distant sister.

Rose and Luisa begin to establish a relationship as sisters, as family, that they had not had a chance to do before the family was separated by thousands of miles, and years of disparate experiences. They do share a common bond in their mother (and to a more acrimonious degree, their father), but even that is weak, as Rose has no memory of her, and only a letter written before she died, which again illustrates the inadequacy of language, or the inadequate grasp of the language in times of great tragedy:

You would think that I would have more to tell you besides this baby spoon; advice and so forth, but I can't think of anything more important right now. You can't put life on a piece of paper. Or love. I am not a smart person with writing down words, but I wish you can understand how I am feeling for you, mine pretty little girl. (LeBow 61)

With this letter, and Luisa's brief descriptions of her memories, Rose is assured that her mother missed her, but is unable to "flesh out" that idea with personal memories or pictures, further illustrating that the influence of the Holocaust extends beyond the War, and the individual experience. Rose has, in effect, become a victim of Luisa's silence and the loss of her mother. She suffers from her mother's discomfort with words. On another level, Rose and Luisa forge a bond as Rose attempts to help Luisa learn English and become more "American" in action and dress: "You look perfect!...Very American" (28), perhaps in an attempt to bring Luisa closer in the only way she can. Notice that to Rose, being American is akin to being perfect and Luisa is on her way to achieving that perfection as she looks more "American."

After reading the letter from her mother and clinging to her baby spoon that was enclosed, Rose does attempt to relate to Luisa's experience by drawing "slowly and deliberately, as if she is carving" a number in pen on her arm (LeBow 61). Initially, Luisa is horrified that her "delicate" sister would do such a thing ("What you done?"), but comforts Rose who still clutches the baby spoon; her only link to a mother she will never know. Luisa, in effect, has taken over the role of mother for her sister who never knew her mother. Her mother's memory is never far from Luisa, thus it seems very appropriate that she would assume that role for Rose.

In the end, what is left of the family is brought together and truly reunited, as one of Mordechai's hunches on where to look for Duvid pays off. Duvid arrives, "older, smaller, thinner than in Luisa's memory, dressed in an ill-fitting suit and hat" (LeBow 63). They stand apart, each wary of the apparent stranger who is confronting them:

DUVID. Can't you look at me?

LUISA. No, I can't.  
 DUVID. Why not?  
 LUISA. I'm afraid. It's too much. You're real. You can't be.  
 DUVID. Look. See.  
 LUISA. So thin! So much older! Lines.  
 DUVID. Can I take my hat off? You're the same. The same.  
 LUISA. A different person. A stranger.  
 DUVID. Luisa.  
 LUISA. Six years. [...]  
 LUISA. Are you well?  
 DUVID. Getting stronger, you?  
 LUISA. Healthy. Getting fat from my sister's cooking. There's too much!  
 How to tell so much! [...]  
 DUVID. I know everything. It was the same with me. Luisa.  
 LUISA. I can't! I can't!... (LeBow 63-4)

Again, language fails Luisa, (or Luisa fails language) as she cannot find a way to tell Duvid of all that has transpired since they last saw each other. Of course, between them as well are the horrors of the camps both endured, of which the audience never hears details. This was LeBow's plan, as we discussed briefly in the Introduction. The audience is meant to fill in their own pictures of the concentration camp experience. As Luisa and Duvid regard each other, between them stands a dead child, and abuses that are foreign to most of the audience. Luisa continues:

LUISA. There's no one left but us.  
 DUVID. I know.  
 LUISA. Duvid.  
 DUVID. What?  
 LUISA. Your name. Duvid.  
 DUVID. Lushke!  
 LUISA. I see her in you. Sprinze [their daughter]. And you never saw her at all. She was beautiful. She looked like you... I was wrong Duvid.  
 There's more than you and me left (LeBow 64-5)

With the memory of their child, Luisa now realizes that there is a reason to go on and to "re-connect" with Duvid. Not only must she serve as Duvid's memory of their child as well as his link to what family remains; she knows she will also serve as Rose's memory of their



mother. Her role expands and she realizes that there is “more than you and me left.” She begins to tell Duvid about her sister and father:

LUISA. *Mayn shvester Rayzel farshtalt a bissell Yiddish, ober si red nor English.* A hundred percent American, she is. I want we should speak English for Rayzel.

DUVID. This I can do. Slow, maybe.

LUISA. We practice a little, yes? *Duvidle.* Mine sister, when you call up on telephone, went in taxi, forget what time it is, all the way to Brooklyn, where lives Papa. She’s gonna bring him here personally, in person.

*Farshtait?*

DUVID. I understand.

LUISA. So we sit here, wait.

DUVID. We got many...years yet for to talk

LUISA. So any minute now is coming a key in the door or they knock or ring the bell maybe. [...] Then, Duvid—Duvid, I should want you to meet...mine family. (*Gradually, the entire family embraces*). (LeBow 65-6)

Again language shows its weaknesses, or Luisa shows her weakness in language, as occasionally she breaks down and can only repeat Duvid's name again and again, as a chant or a word that brings her great comfort. Even Duvid acknowledges that they “have many years to talk” and allows that time will be of great value in healing the wounds inflicted by the Holocaust not only on him and Luisa but on the family that they had, were, and are going to create and nurture. Also for perhaps the first time in the play, the word “family” is used in a positive sense, not as something that has been killed, but as something that will live. Luisa views Rose and Mordechai as her family and, in the final embrace shared by all, Duvid is included, and the audience can leave the theatre feeling assured that from the ashes of the Holocaust, a family will be born anew.

As we have seen, regardless of whether the victim was Jewish or not (though most of the victims we have looked at are Jewish), that individual’s family suffered. As we noted in the beginning of this chapter, often whole families were eliminated, as well as the

prospect of a family (as we saw with Eva and Alexander, and Trudi and her lover). If a family, in tatters, was able to reunite after the war, the audience or reader is aware that there is much work to be done to be a family again.

It is interesting to note that those works that concentrate on the victim often seem to focus on the destruction of the family, with little written about survival. Obviously, the concepts of victim and destruction seem to be somewhat intertwined, but it is heartening to note that not all of the works leave the reader/audience bereft of hope. *A Shayna Maidel* lets the audience know that not all is lost; there can be families born from the ashes of the Holocaust.

In the next chapter, we will again see that the family was a victim of the beliefs of the individual, this time of the Resistor. Danger was a way of life, and that danger did not target only one person.

## CHAPTER 4. THE RESISTORS AND THEIR FAMILIES

*Suppose, in addition to fear and grief, the victims' shame  
and the survivors' guilt, we could feel, if only for a moment,  
pride and joy at...resistance? Suppose one of our dominant  
responses to the horrors of the Holocaust were to become wonder  
that the victims could live, love, create and struggle.  
Suppose delight were to take its place besides sorrow?*

Roger S. Gottlieb

It seems somehow appropriate to begin the final chapter of this paper with the idea that there is something positive to be raised “from the ashes,” as Gottlieb suggests. Those who resisted the Nazi forces fought terrible odds and great danger to save those they could, be it one or 100. Many of those who resisted died. But it can be said that they did not die in vain. Within the texts we will be looking at, we will find resistors who are brave, pragmatic, even angry, but who shared one thing. They did not approve of what the Nazis were doing to the Jews and others who were being killed. And they did something about it.

As we shall see, for those who took part in resisting the Nazis, actions could involve armed battle, covert terrorism or arranging means of helping Jews hide or escape (Marrus 133-4). But at times the idea of resistance wasn't as clearly motivated; Raul Hilberg tells of a high-ranking Nazi official stationed in France who kept an entire town safe, while ordering the murder of thousands in a neighboring area, for reasons no one ever understood (78).

For those who helped Jews in any way, the dangers were obvious. Marrus outlines the actions taken against one group of resistors within a ghetto: “The Gestapo seized the entire family of each fugitive or all who lived with him; they also seized the leaders of all Jewish work parties in the vicinity, together with their families. All were shot” (133). Again, the family was victim of the Holocaust. While circumstances were not always that

extreme, we shall see what Eva Fogelman reminds us were the “everyday” things that tested the rescuers:

[they] were forced to cope, on a daily basis, with the simple problems of getting food to Jews, disposing of human waste, arranging for whatever small comforts were available, over weeks, months, or years of concealment—while at the same time maintaining a normal front under the watchful eyes of suspicious neighbors. (85)

These actions, of course, made life a constant risk for resisters, putting themselves and their families in daily danger.

We have already seen Rachel, in Kraus’ *Remember My Name*, as a victim.

However, Rachel finds herself a willing resistor, working with a member of her new “family”: her teacher, Suzanne, who rooms with Mme. Barbière during the long, snowy winters. She poses as Julian’s girlfriend to help the resistance group, the Maquis. While Suzanne passes messages to and from Julian’s resistance group, she also attracts the romantic attentions of the Nazi Hans Schmidt. Hans, in his close attention to Suzanne, becomes highly suspicious of the relationship between Suzanne and Julian, and arrests Julian. Thus, Suzanne, with her link to Julian, and being watched by Hans, becomes a dangerous liability in delivering Julian’s message, so Rachel, in an attempt to aid her new family, volunteers to deliver it, soon finding herself in serious danger:

RACHEL: I’ll go!

MARIE-THERESE: It’s twenty kilometers from here, little one.

RACHEL: I went with you last summer.

MARIE-THERESE: It’s much too dangerous for you, Madeleine. Le Puy is full of Nazis.

RACHEL: I know the way...

MARIE-THERESE: No! This is no business for a little girl.

SUZANNE: That’s the point. Who would guess?

MARIE-THERESE: I promised to take care of her, and I will.

RACHEL: But I want to go! And I’m twelve years old now! (Kraus 84)

As Rachel arrives, parks her bike and begins to whistle the Resistance song that will be her contact's signal, she is unaware that she parked her bike in a "no-parking" area. As she discovers this, she hears her contact whistle back, and is unsure what to do. Rachel passes on the message "the boots are ready" to her contact, and confronts the officer who is ticketing her bicycle. As she is doing all these, she is also "caught" by a neighbor who, in the desire to get more food through the Nazis, reports Rachel to the ever-present Hans Schmidt for the theft of Suzanne's bicycle. Hans demands that the French officer arrest Rachel for theft:

HANS: Arrest her!

GERARD: It was parked in the wrong place, that's all. I gave her a ticket.

HANS: And pocketed the fine? Arrest her!

GERARD: Why?

HANS: The bicycle isn't hers. It's stolen. (Kraus 90)

Hans recognizes Suzanne's bicycle, and interrogates Rachel as to why she has it. She insists she has borrowed it to sell lace (Kraus 91), but he suspects that there is much more than meets the eye:

HANS: Now Madeleine, we are going to talk. You see, Madeleine, I have a puzzle. A nice, neat, puzzle, except there's a piece missing. And now you're going to help me find it.

RACHEL: Yes, Herr Lieutenant Schmidt.

HANS: You're not her cousin, are you?

RACHEL: Whose?

HANS: Madame Barbière's.

RACHEL: Yes. Yes I am!

HANS: You said before you were her husband's cousin. Which is it?

RACHEL: That's what I meant. Her husband's cousin.

HANS: We will do whatever's necessary—to get the truth. Do you understand?

RACHEL: Yes. (Kraus 92)

It is clear that Hans suspects that it wasn't only Julian who was involved in the Resistance, but Suzanne, and because she lives with her, Rachel. If Rachel makes one slip, the "puzzle" will be complete, and nearly everyone in the core family of the play will be in great danger. Just as her father predicted, Rachel has to lie, convincingly, repeat again and again that she *was* Madeleine Petit, and must stand firm in the story that has become her life. She chooses each of her words carefully as to not expose her secret identity and endanger not only herself but her "family." Fortuitously, as he was when Rachel boarded the train from Marseilles, the local priest, Père Antoine is there to "vouch" for Rachel:

HANS: Then you will vouch for her identity?

PÈRE: Certainly!

HANS: Perjury, Père Antoine, is punishable by death. Even for a priest.

PÈRE: Especially for a priest! We're taught not to lie in the eyes of God. As a priest, I may think about heaven, but I'm in no hurry to get there!

HANS: Do you swear that she is Madeleine Petit?

PÈRE: I know her by no other name.

HANS: You swear?

PÈRE: I swear.

HANS: A priest's word is sacred.

PÈRE: So they say.

HANS: I will accept it. (Kraus 94-5)

Note Père Antoine's clever use of language in the incident above. He never actually lies to Herr Schmidt. He is honest when he says he didn't know Rachel by any other name, and when he says, "ever since I have known her, she has been Madeleine Petit" (94). This is not the last time that Père Antoine puts himself in the "line of fire" for another. To get Julian out of jail, Père Antoine switches places with him, assuring Julian that "they won't kill a priest" (100), having great (faulty) faith in the moral fiber of the German jailers. He never returns. His willingness to sacrifice himself for Rachel and Julian serves as a reminder of what Kraus states: "We each say 'NO' in our own way. One person can make a difference.

It is possible to have the courage to defy tyranny, that courage can be... simple..." (letter to author), yet enduring and life-saving.

We never learn the meaning of the message Rachel delivered or if it served its purpose, because soon after, the war ends. Rachel's father returns for her, as we saw in the previous chapter, and they begin the slow, painful process of rebuilding their family. What we do know is that if Rachel had not been careful, she would have put her adopted St. Laurent family in great danger. Because of her cleverness, she is able to save, or preserve, her family. Resisters, as shown in this work, come in all shapes and sizes; there can be few generalizations about what a resistor is or their motivations. Rachel wanted to help Suzanne; she had no great ambitions of helping the Maquis.

Like Kraus' Suzanne, Hegi's Trudi and her father are, willingly, in the "thick" of the resistance, in Hegi's *Stones*. As owners of the pay library, they have a bit more freedom to move about unquestioned, and are somewhat more capable of helping people to escape. The idea of building a shelter between their house and that of their neighbors, the Blaus, first comes up when Herr Blau suffers a crisis of conscience upon sending a young Jew away:

He reminded himself that he'd never done anything against the Jews, even when others had humiliated them. He had not approved when Jews had lost their jobs and houses, and he'd always felt concerned about those who'd disappeared, hoping they'd found a better place to live. If he were Jewish, he had told his wife many times, he would have had the good sense to leave Germany long ago. (Hegi 308)

But those thoughts don't comfort him, as he realizes he could have done *something* to help the young man: "he could have given him a blanket, an egg, his coat" (Hegi 308). The way he constructs his thoughts shows us the power of language to help rationalize a sense of

safety. Yes, Herr Blau had felt bad about those who were taken, but, in their situation, he would have left the country, implying that because they didn't, they practically deserved what they had gotten. Yet, he realized that "to deny help to someone in need...was far more devastating than to fear for his own safety" (Hegi 309). Overcoming his inertia, and wanting to take action, he approaches Trudi's father and whispers "If you ever know of someone who needs help—. Someone who maybe has to hide...I want to help too" (Hegi 309). Blau brings a new aspect to light regarding resisters. Not all are noble, or practice out of the moral goodness of their souls. Instead, the practice resistance out of guilt, remorse, or the realization that the resistor is indeed luckier than the victim, and perhaps can share some of that luck with those victims he/she can help.

When a woman and her small son show up under Trudi's porch, it becomes obvious it is dangerous to keep people in the house without an escape; it is, as Trudi notes, a "trap" (Hegi 324-6). So a tunnel is constructed between the Montags and the Blaues. Within the tunnel lived, for varying amounts of time, not only Eva and the young woman and child that prompted the construction of the tunnel, but a "taxi driver from Bremen," two older sisters from Koln, a priest who had escaped, and more: all "contributed to improving the tunnel" (Hegi 355-600). Whereas Trudi and her father had felt an undeniable need to help those escaping, Herr Blau discovered his need to help only after sending someone away.

As refugees came and went, the hiding place evolved and the means of protecting it improved as well. During the times that the Gestapo conducted searches, those in hiding huddled in the damp tunnel, as Trudi found herself lying to the police, and using her *zwerg* size as a means of slowing and dissuading them.



She'd tilt her face toward them, sideways, draw her neck into her shoulders, make herself smaller, harmless, helpful...her body would lean into a limp, slowing them for a few precious seconds, as she'd offer to lead them through the house, and she'd hobble out of their way as they'd crush past her....[she held] a cold certainty that the tunnel was safe—had to be safe. (Hegi 360)

Hegi writes that Trudi and her father treated each refugee with the utmost respect when they were with them, as if that could save them from a potentially ghastly fate and reinforce their humanity, which the Final Solution” had stripped away. Their good friend Emil Hespig and his brother, a Bishop, worked to coordinate escape paths for those that would hide. After Eva's capture however, they decide that the tunnel is unsafe, and it houses no more fugitives (Hegi 371).

Unrelated to the tunnel, but related to the feeling of wanting to do something in the face of the evil of the Nazis, Emil was later shot for stealing the small gold statue of Hitler that was placed in the town square (Hegi 411). Even Trudi was arrested for an unfortunate comment made at a piano recital, and held for three weeks, before a “cold-eyed” Nazi let her go with a warning about what could happen to “someone like you in our country...you become an experiment...a medical experiment for the almighty profession...some people might even say that a *zwerg* has no right to live” (Hegi 381). Yet, even Trudi notes that the danger and hazards they faced were nothing compared with what those who were sent to the camps would or did face.

In all cases above, the resistors worked within their families, and couldn't necessarily trust those outside that core unit. Friends and acquaintances were sent away from the Montag's pay library because of the risk that those hiding below would be discovered. The Montag's life was stifled in many ways, as their social interaction was curbed by their actions as resistors. But it is apparent that they felt the gains outweighed

the losses, and the lives that were saved were very much worth the social opportunities that were lost.

As we saw with the families of victims, resisters came in all descriptions, their acts, both great and small, did much to save or prolong the lives of those they chose to help. They often did what they did out of quiet dislike for what the Nazis stood for, and, without much thought to their own safety, placed their own lives in jeopardy to do so. As was stated in the beginning of the chapter, this was a ray of hope in the darkness that was the Holocaust.

But in the dark cloud that is the Holocaust, what does this (albeit fictional) ray of hope mean? We have learned that resistance was not futile, but difficult, dangerous and debilitating. Some resisters were enthusiastic, come what may; some did it not realizing the danger they faced, and some did it because of what could really be a different form of survivor's guilt. In other words, these people resisted the deadly force of the Nazis because they were human beings with emotions, reactions and independent thoughts, and would not be swallowed up by the Nazi machine which attempted to tell them who deserved to live and who didn't.

And what of the fact that these characters were written by non-participants of the Holocaust? Perhaps that new angle or lens allows the reader to approach the resistor's role with more idealism, more clarity and more appreciation of the true dangers that the resisters faced. Resisters were not perfect, but they did many things that many people were too afraid, or unwilling, to do, often putting their own lives in tremendous danger. Non-participant literature can shed light anew on the Holocaust and the roles within it, to allow

for continued discussion and, indeed, celebration of those who would risk sacrificing themselves for the well-being of others.

## CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS

*What luck I can pick  
 berries in the wood  
 I thought  
 there is no wood no berries.  
 What luck I can lie  
 in the shade of a tree  
 I thought trees no longer give shade.  
 What luck I am with you  
 my heart beats so  
 I thought man  
 has no heart.*

Tadeusz Rosewicz

I became fully aware of the Holocaust in the fall of 1995, when I was cast as Helen in Taylor's *Good* by director Janet Rubin. Before that time, I am ashamed to admit that, while I had been aware of the term "Holocaust" and seen *Schindler's List*, I was woefully ignorant of more than the bare facts of the atrocities in Germany from 1933 to 1945. I remember being appalled by the actions of the Nazis in the movie, but I didn't cry.

After being involved in this play, and hearing the speakers whom Janet brought in, I viewed *Schindler's List* again. The moment that struck me most profoundly, and drew me to tears, was the scene in which the Nazis are eating and drinking merrily in a chalet above the concentration camp, only a few hundred feet from suffering few of them would ever know or comprehend. The "schizophrenia" of that situation deeply affected me. How could *anyone* with a conscience and the ability to think have "fun" while being responsible for the death of a multitude of innocent people?

Yet, look at how I worded that last sentence. I am limiting, or acknowledging the limitations of my understanding of the Holocaust, by implying that some struggled with their consciences and that I consider the victims innocent. Does it matter whether they were

innocent or not? I do not think so. Because someone thought that a number of groups of people were not worthy of life, those groups of people were targeted for extermination, and upwards of eleven million people lost their lives in camps, pogroms, ghettos and in the streets. We must also remember that number doubles if we consider those who died in battle to be victims as well (Marrus 11). Recognizing the depth of violence and death seen in those few short years reinforce the knowledge that we must be most careful to stop such actions that could possibly resemble the Final Solution. Recent actions in countries such as Bosnia, Kosovo and Rwanda illustrate that we are not entirely successful; we must continue to be vigilant.

Those who were not victims, or eyewitnesses, of the Holocaust have only begun to uncover the tip of the deadly iceberg and its myriad incomprehensibilities. This thesis has approached only a few, and only hopes to further conversation, ideally adding, not subtracting from it. Non-participants wish not to silence anyone, but to be allowed, too, to speak.

What is the definition of a perpetrator? Was an “ordinary” German who passively watched the Jews being led away to slaughter less at fault than a Nazi who personally led groups to mass graves in the forest?<sup>13</sup> From both Halder from *Good* and Helmut from *Stones from the River* we learned that not all perpetrators were the “obvious” faces of evil that we might instinctively place under the perpetrator label. Those authors who are survivors or scholars may indeed be unwilling to discuss the possible facets of evil that

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<sup>13</sup> See Christopher Browning’s *Ordinary Men* for a fascinating study of the real men of Police Battalion 101 and the effect their role in the mass killings had.

Holocaust perpetrators exhibit. By bringing us Helmut Eberhardt and John Halder, these non-participant authors are asking us to reconsider the popular notion of a perpetrator and open our eyes to the intricate moral levels that exist within all of us. Perhaps we are all capable of great evil if the circumstances are just right. These authors ask us to consider what we would do in these particular situations, and reevaluate our easy condemnation of caricature-ish or stereotypical evil.

How do we define a victim? Are those who were exterminated at Auschwitz more “victim-like” than someone who “escaped” from Germany in 1933? Is Sigmund Freud less of a victim than Elie Weisel? Eva and Alexander from *Stones from the River* and Rose from *A Shayna Maidel* illustrate that more than those in the concentration camp suffered the far reaching effects of the Holocaust’s deadly grasp. Indeed, as non-participant authors have helped to conversely problematize and enlighten the definition of resistor, the same can be said for their contribution to the role of the victim.

Anne Frank is celebrated as the most well-known Holocaust victim in the world, yet Rose, whose mother was killed in the camps, suffered as well at the hands of the Nazis. Trudi’s neighbors were taken away and killed, and Trudi lost the love of her life. There can be objective attempts to delineate levels of suffering, yes, but all the characters or people I just mentioned have suffered. Non-participant literature again stretches the boundaries of our perceptions of the Holocaust, and allows conversation, incorporating these fresh ideas, to continue.

How do we define a resistor? Was the character of Suzanne, who put herself in danger, more of a resistor than those who “merely” disagreed with Hitler’s plans? Kraus’ Rachel from *Remember My Name* and the Hegi’s *zwerg* Trudi from *Stones from the River*

both answer that question with a resounding no. In addition, we have seen that some resisters called their actions merely disagreement with the Nazis. As we discussed, there is a means, brought about by non-participant literature, to view the actions of the resisters with great hope and renewed faith in the human condition.

I don't believe that there are right or wrong answers for these questions. Personal perception enters the picture when we attempt to sit in judgment, and I have trouble believing that there is an objective means of establishing a hierarchy of degrees of good or evil in something as catastrophic in scope as the Holocaust undeniably is. We humans can be perpetrators, victims and resisters, all at once. In the words of ethicist Philip Hallie, people are "not neither villain nor saint, pure and simple...we are mixtures of caring and indifference, helping and hurting" (Lang 98), like all of the characters we have read about.

We, twenty-first (and -second) century Americans, have faults.

Trudi drove her friend Eva away even as she attempted to draw her close. Rose believed she was helping Luisa by helping her to look "American."

We don't always know the difference between right or wrong.

Halder grew unable to distinguish his "humane" actions from those we would consider barbaric.

We don't always want to do what is considered socially or morally upright.

Herr Blau knows he would have left the country if he were Jewish, but he knew he could not *not* help those Jews who passed through Burgdorf in some way. Rachel lied to save herself and her family

We don't always like those people we love.

Rose and Luisa struggle to establish a relationship as sisters, in even the most mundane of ways. Trudi's pleas could not make Eva stay in the safety of the shelter.

We are not always the most heroic or the most evil of people.

Rose attempted both to relate to the terrors her sister faced, and push them away at the same time, urging her sister to be more "American."

The questions (and answers) discussed in this thesis are only a few of those which Holocaust survivors, scholars, authors and playwrights struggle to answer, perhaps only to find that there are few concrete answers. As non-participants enter the arena and struggle with these same questions, we have the opportunity to get some different insights, and some new means of examining the issues that to some may not need any new discussion. Does not having lived through the Holocaust give some authors "distance" from the events, a distance that perhaps provides a clear view of the inexplicability of the Holocaust? Does it render them "ineligible" to comment upon the actions of the Holocaust? I believe that this thesis has made progress to proving that the answer would be "yes" to the first question, "no" to the second.

In reading *Stones from the River*, we can get a "that-has-been" moment so crucial to reader involvement, drawing us in, and making us care, therefore bringing those readers who knew little about the Holocaust to some of the most poignant issues associated with the Holocaust. Similarly, both *Good* and *A Shayna Maidel* draw us in to the play, and more broadly the Holocaust, with their vivid characters who bring us to different angles to the Holocaust. I don't believe that any non-participant claims a clear understanding or, conversely, an unworthiness to write about the Holocaust. They merely want to be allowed on the field of play, or to write about something that looms so large on the horizon of world



history. In supporting the arguments I presented in the beginning of this paper, to “let” others into the arena of the Holocaust, I don’t believe anyone has the desire to “appropriate” the experience of the survivor. To do so would be akin to sacrilege.

Because of that respect for the unique, life-altering experiences of the survivor, the works analyzed in this paper do not take us into the camps, the ghetto or even the mind of the survivor. By doing this, they grant the testimony of the survivor the respect it deserves and do not attempt to usurp the survivor’s position, or speak for the survivor. They deliberately (I believe) take us to the outskirts of Germany, the mind of an “ordinary” German caught up in the Nazi war machine, to France and to America. These works do not ask us to believe that they understand what experiencing Auschwitz could have been like. We, the audience, are saved from being taken to a camp where our clothes are stripped from us, our heads are shaved, and naked, we are judged fit or unfit for life or excruciating work designed to kill us. We as an audience, are saved from the idea that, if we are judged fit to work, we would have to survive on less than 200 calories a day as we work for long hours at pointless jobs designed to kill us. As we read this and try to comprehend that outlandish possibility, are we able to understand, and put ourselves inside that idea? I know I’m not. And the authors I have chosen know that and choose alternate ways of approaching the Holocaust, carving for themselves a means of approaching the Holocaust that perhaps brings the non-participant audience/reader to the events of the Holocaust in a way that they will more easily understand, and appreciate. The audience/reader of today is indeed a true outsider of the Holocaust, and the approach of the outsider within Holocaust literature allows us a window to events too horrible to fully comprehend. Non-participant writers, such as those examined in this paper are using their considerable talents to keep the

memory of the Holocaust burning bright, to problematize our stereotypes about those within the Holocaust, and assure that we never again lose eleven million or more people to unmistakable evil. By using the stereotypical and understood roles of the Holocaust as a means of organizing this thesis, I have attempted to give the reader a means of grounding his/herself. Most of us know at least the denotative meaning of those labels, and some may know the connotative meaning. By combining what we know with what we can learn from non-participant authors in the continued conversation of the Holocaust, we can continue to make strides toward stopping actions that even remotely resemble the Holocaust from happening again.

One of my freshman composition students was reading an article on the Amnesty International webpage about the injustices incurred by a foreign government to its own people. She wrote "I can't understand how people can do this to other people." Perhaps non-participant voice in the literature of atrocity can go a long way to help us understand it, and in turn, stop it.

## APPENDIX

**Holocaust timeline****1933**

30 January: Hitler becomes Reich Chancellor.  
 22 March: Himmler establishes Dachau.  
 10 May: Public book-burnings of books by opponents to Nazism (See *Good*, and Halder's participation.)

**1935**

15 September: Sweeping anti-Jewish racist legislation passes at Nuremberg (effecting Eva and Alexander's chance to marry in *Stones*).

**1937**

17 May: Buchewald concentration camp opens.

**1938**

October: "Aryanization" of property of Germany.  
 28 October: Expulsion of some 17,000 Polish Jews from Zbaszyn on the Polish border.  
 9-10 November: *Kristallnacht*.

**1939**

1 September: World War II begins with German invasion of Poland.  
 3 September: Britain and France declare war on Germany (see *Remember my Name*, and Rachel's escape).  
 October: "Euthanasia" program—murder of institutionalized handicapped persons—begins. (*Good's* Halder's participation).

**1940**

30 April: Germans create the first major Jewish ghetto in Lodz, in incorporated Poland.

November: Warsaw Ghetto sealed off.

**1941**

31 July: Goering appoints Heydrich to implement the Final Solution.  
 23 September: First gassing experiments in Auschwitz; 600 Soviet prisoners of war and 200 Poles are killed.  
 8 December: Chelmno killing center begins mass gassings.

**1942**

Spring: Mass gassings begin at Sobibor, Belzec, and Treblinka, where 1.5 million Jews are killed by late 1943.  
 22 July: First large scale deportation of Jews from Warsaw to Treblinka.  
 17 December: Allies resolve to punish Nazis responsible for mass murder of Jews.

**1943**

16 May: Liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto begins.  
 June: Himmler orders liquidation of all ghettos in Poland and Soviet Union.

**1944**

15 May: Deportations of 437,402 Jews from Hungary begin; most are gassed upon arrival at Auschwitz.  
 6 June: Allies invade Normandy.

**1945**

18 January: Auschwitz evacuated; prisoner's "Death March" begins.  
 11 April- 3 May: Allies liberate Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen, Dauchau and Mauthausen (*Shayna Maidel's* Luisa is freed).  
 30 April: Hitler commits suicide.  
 7 May: Germany surrenders and war in Europe ends.

## Geographical Map of the Concentration Camps



Map and graph reproduced in Bauer, Yahuda. *A History of the Holocaust*. New York: Franklin Watts. 1982, 204. From Martin Gilbert's *The Holocaust*.

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